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RETURN TO SCOTLAND

An Egoist's Journey

by

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I

I STOOD upon one of the eastern spurs of the Pentland Hills and looked down upon that prospect which quite suddenly and completely discovers the "North" to the traveller walking from England. In the distance I could see a dark line, which may have been clouds or may have been the Highlands; at my feet there lay the steep and rock-built town of Edinburgh, its crown of smoke perpetually drifting, and between those distant hills and this immediate city there were many bleak and Northern things which I forget, or lack the skill to describe, but which all proclaimed to me that my last link with England was broken and that the ancient kingdom of Scotland was before me.

I had, during the past nine years, in my enjoyment of the more comfortable South, dismissed as far as I was able all memories of the circumstances of my boyhood in this country. Now, however, as I looked over this scene, what I can only clumsily describe as the *fact* of Scotland hit me with unexpected suddenness and force between the eyes of the mind, and brought me dangerously near to the vulgar and despised emotion of patriotism : an emotion, let me point out, which is not founded upon reasonable admiration, but upon irrational affection. Perhaps the beauty of the scene surprised me out of my true self ; perhaps some hereditary memory was awakened ; perhaps—to use the popular jargon—my repressions were released from my subconscious ; I don't know. But I do know that there crowded in on me a confusion of strange thoughts. I seemed to comprehend the whole race in my imagination. I thought of all the Scotsmen

in innumerable pubs all over the world, getting drunk as only Scotsmen can do ; of the shy, clumsy youths newly arrived in London and making, almost passionately, the same absurd mistakes—which only Scotsmen can make ; of the Scotsmen on humorous picture postcards ; of the Scotsmen in funny stories ; of the Scotsmen rising to the head of great businesses ; of the Scotsmen hopelessly failing ; of the Scotsmen being super-sensitively offended ; of the Scotsmen being offensively and unwarrantably rude ; of the Scotsmen conducting tediously logical arguments with Englishmen who will not listen ; of the Scotsmen making the most barefaced appeals to the emotions, to which everyone cannot help listening ; of the Scotsmen in music-halls ; of the Scotsmen in musical comedies ; of the Scotsmen in romantic dramas ; of the Scotsmen being religious ; of the Scotsmen being ponderously atheistical ; of those being coarse, those being "refined," those being sloppy, those most charmingly courteous and those being beyond words ridiculous.

I recognized in a flash the strong national emotion which combines all these different people, and which is the force behind all their so different but violent actions. I thought of all the nonsense that has been written about Scotland and the Scots, and though I realized how difficult it is to understand them, I surprisingly found myself being angry as I thought of the stupid uncomprehending abuse which the Scots themselves have in some ways done so much to deserve, and of the far more painful sentimental slobbering over them which they have done nothing to deserve.

In the arrogant heat of the moment I congratulated myself on my powers of perception and my fortunate situation. For here was I, in the height of summer, at liberty to indulge the pleasure of aimlessly wandering, and in a country which by the accident of my birth and boyhood I should be able to understand, but which by my Southern education I should be able to approach with

freshness. I should sympathise where the foreigner would not understand. I should perceive where the native would neglect. I should have my cake and eat it.

My arrogant mood soon exhausted itself and my wanderings turned out to be even more aimless than I had supposed; but my excitement and curiosity were sustained long enough to lead me upon a journey which was partly a rediscovery and partly a homecoming, but which was for me more surprising and delightful than any of the other expeditions abroad which a rather ill-controlled and vaguely spent youth has compelled me to take.

And yet, homecoming though this was, it was an odd thing that this prospect from the Pentlands should have so elated me, for I had often seen it before and by no means in romantic circumstances—I had hated the sight of it then. A few hundred feet below where I was now standing there was the highest point in a little mountain path, which was the culmination of one of those barbarous "runs" which the Scottish schools make their victims endure. It was just here, where this view came in sight, that my tiredness used to become almost intolerable. It was here that prefects, who had walked out to this spot, used to wait for us and flog us home with their "twisties"—thongs of knotted leather—stinging about our bare knees. It was just here that there used to come into my mouth that unmistakable half-salt, half-bitter-tasting saliva, which seems to be the product of lungs that feel as if they are going to burst. I had often here looked down at the city across those dark-soiled rolling Scottish fields and envied the sea-gulls, who freely and upon effortless wings were able to slip down from these tortured heights. I used never to be so fortunate as some of the weaker boys, who just here, or a little farther on, used to become so sick with tiredness that they vomited and were allowed to walk home. I used to envy them almost as much as I envied the sea-gulls.

My boyhood in Scotland was on the whole very

unpleasant, for the Scottish adolescent is generally more uncomfortable than is any other youth. However, that time now lay fairly far behind me, for the years between sixteen and twenty-five are very long ones. The scene was for me almost purged of all its disgusting associations, and I descended into my native city with my elation still undashed, and my curiosity both about my country and my own sensations sharpened to a fine edge.

This high mood met its first check as I passed through the new suburbs which the town has recently excreted in the Craiglockart direction. Those mock baronial products of Scottish pseudo-Romanticism were not the best circumstances to sustain the somewhat self-righteous glow of a returning prodigal, but that glow was perhaps not quite sentimental enough to be extinguished so easily and lasted until I had penetrated to the first fringe of the essential city. That I knew, and found, to be immovable and indestructible. Those huge black houses which flank the precipitous and ample streets that lead from Morningside down into the town, those I knew to be as permanent as Stonehenge and as impressive. Though I did not lose my way, I was surprised to find how much my South-soaked mind had forgotten of the general effect. I knew that I should find the streets broader, but I had forgotten the height of the houses and their frightening colour. That deepest possible grey just stops short of a real blackness which, by its positiveness, might have been a little more alluring. And then, their massiveness! To pull down those great buildings would be almost as difficult as to rebuild them. They loom over and dominate the traveller, but they are without question the real thing—they are dignified; and (if he be as subtle and intelligent as I suppose him to be) he will, after his surprise on seeing them, take pleasure in the ponderous shapes.

When I had reached the end of the "Lothian Road," I struck eastwards along Princes Street until I came to Leith Walk, which I descended in search of cheap

lodgings. I eventually discovered a " Beds for Gentlemen " house, which charged half a crown a night. I was rather rudely treated by the landlady, who, after my enquiries about a bed for the night, looked me up and down a long time before she answered me. It seemed to me that she looked at my heavy and dusty boots longer than was necessary, and regarded my rucksack with suspicion. Accustomed to the smoother manners of the South, I was, for the moment, irritated and depressed ; but I remembered my own observations upon the slow and suspicious manners of the Lowland hotel-keepers, and reserved my patience. I was rewarded for this : for when she had decided to let me in, she became very kind and obviously decided to take me under her wing. She asked me whether I was going North in search of work : how long I had been on the road. She gave me a glass of milk without charging me for it, and gave me advice as to where to stop the next night if I was making in the Stirling direction.

As the next day was Sunday, I asked her to call me early so that I could go to the early Mass at the Cathedral nearby, and get well on my way in the morning. Having done so, it occurred to me to tell her that I was Irish, just to test those stories one hears about the panic the Scots are in about the Irish coming to work in Scotland. She did not show the slightest displeasure, and even went so far as to say that she preferred the Irish to the English. What did, however, rather disconcert her was when I asked her for some warm water in which to bathe my tired feet. A bath she could understand—though she did not possess one in the house—but to bathe the feet, and the feet only, seemed to her a piece of finickiness which was too nice. I am afraid my request a little lowered her opinion of me.

As soon as I had refreshed my feet I was impatient to set forth on an evening exploration of Edinburgh. So, on the excuse of going out for supper, I left the " Beds for Gentlemen only " and promised to be in by eleven.

II

I BEGAN my rediscovery of my " home town " with some excitement, both because of a pleasure in reviving my fading memories of the place and because I knew I was about to see something entirely new, which as a boy I had dimly recognised but never explored. For Edinburgh, more than any place I know of, leads a double life. It, and not London, is the real background for the story of Jekyll and Hyde ; and when once he has met Jekyll even the most respectable of us has a sneaking desire to see Hyde.

As I came up Leith Walk there accompanied me a faint summer mist from the sea, which was just strong enough to help the lagging June twilight's progress towards the night and, while I walked westwards along Princes Street, to obscure the form of the Castle Rock, but not thick enough to hide the lights of its crowning buildings, which one after the other gently pierced the soft evening and reminded the strollers in the luxurious thoroughfare of the heights above them. It was getting late, and I realized that there was very little time to be lost before the pubs of the old part of the town were forcibly to be closed. I therefore turned down left with the Lothian Road and thence, skirting the south side of the Castle Rock, began a roundabout ascent through the Cowgate. The change from the bourgeois Lothian Road, only a few hundred yards behind me, was startlingly sudden ; for, beyond the greater age of the houses, there was little difference in them. Merely upon the quality of the scene there fell the atmosphere of decay and of carelessness : carelessness with, for me, an intoxicating violence in it, which gave it so new a " zip," and I was reminded very forcibly (as I climbed up to the romantically squalid heights which I had recently seen hanging so nearly over the equally romantically respectable Princes Street) that Edinburgh is a city of violent extremes.

To begin with : it is for a large part of the year the victim of some of the harshest weather in the British Isles. Even on this benign evening the marrow of my bones could, as I thought on it, recall the savagery of the winter wind which can fill Edinburgh to its remotest recess. It lies open to the north-east—the cruellest quarter and one from which the wind is frequent. On the south side it is protected by the Pentland Hills, and yet these hills in winter hold the snow in their heights and gullies, so that when the winds in winter do reach the city from the south, they are too often already embittered by their passage. When the winds are not blowing there is the "Haar"—the cold, insinuating mist that rises from the North Sea and floods the town. It can be as painful and is certainly more depressing than the storms. The wide, open streets, the huge squares, the steep hills and long avenues somehow catch and guide the tempests ; once they have begun, they rage in and out of the town so that there seems no hope of them leaving it.

And yet, when the surprising benediction of a quiet summer day falls upon the city and the grim and battered houses emerge looking rather embarrassed in the pale champagne-coloured sunshine, which, curiously enough, is warmer than it appears ; when the shops in Princes Street hang out their banners like Italian palaces on a feast day ; and the flowers in the gardens below them find the light to blaze out in their fine Northern colours; and the bands play; and the flags fly over the Castle; and the ugly people (of which there are, alas ! so many in Edinburgh) seem mysteriously to disappear and only the faces of the truer, more loyal, handsome type are seen abroad ; and the spikes, towers and cornices of the old part of the town stream up like mediæval skyscrapers against a background of faultless blue—then, indeed, the traveller cries out in admiration that there is in Europe nothing gayer nor more genial than this surprising town. Perhaps, such extravagant praise may have been wrung from

him by the strength of the contrast, but it is certainly true that Edinburgh is then a very pleasant place indeed.

Though this contrast of days is typical of the other contrasts in the city, these finer days are rare, and in so far as climate can influence the character of a people (on which point I am doubtful) the violent extremes of Edinburgh and its inhabitants are the reflection of the more violent and frequent days. Architecturally and socially (when you omit the suburbs, which even now do not bulk very large), Edinburgh falls into two violently opposed groups.

The "New Town" is a beautiful, if austere, example of town planning. It was built at the time of the Regency and from the massive Scottish stone which nothing seems able to destroy. The crescents, squares, parallelograms and avenues are all dignifiedly and harmoniously constructed. At just the right spacing the one swells out into the other, or contracts into the next. Across trim expanses of well-kept, shrilly green grass on streets of cobble-stones, house front corresponds to house front, doorstep to doorstep, and even chimney to chimney. One is reminded of Bath, save that the bleakness of the stone, with its added sombreness of a black coat of smoke, makes a contrast with the warmth and greater geniality of the Somersetshire town. The permanent and ordered beauty of the whole thing is like a very austere fugue by Bach.

Hanging high above this deliberate architecture, which is in a valley, there is the "Old Town," built upon an astonishing rock which some prehistoric volcanic upheaval expelled very nearly a quarter of a mile above the neighbouring land. This "Old Town" is, in every way, the opposite of the New. High up in the air, flaunting itself, it is a profusion of romantic abandonment in stone. House climbs upon the back of house—for, like New York, the "Old Town" was built upon a kind of island, so separate is its rock from the land, and in the eighteenth century the only room for expansion was upwards—tower

appears behind tower, belfry upon belfry, gargoyles, cornices, spikes, and a thousand pinnacles and projections, for which I know no name, contest with one another in these heights in a fascinating disorder until, if one gazes long enough at them, they look as if they were a part of some nightmare of the mediæval North.

The people who live in these two different parts of Edinburgh differ and correspond in exactly the same way as do their houses. The comfortably-off inhabitants of the New Town and the impoverished swarms who live in the Old have a common and unmistakable nationality, as their houses are all made from a common and unmistakable black stone. But as the architecture of one is ordered and that of the other profuse, so are the lives of the lawyers, doctors, gentlemen of leisure, and their dependants unusually restrained and exact : while those of the working people, in their high crow's-nests, exaggerated and wild. In no other town that I have lived in, have I seen rectitude so profound and certain, or abandonment so passionate.

That word is the secret of the whole business and the thing that is so difficult to drive into foreigners' heads. The Scots are a passionate race. Their failings and their virtues spring from their ample passion. Their very caution is a passionate caution ; and this is the quality which the inhabitants of the old and new town share. The gloom, the restraint of the well-to-do spring from a passion to conserve what has been passionately won. The really terrifying abandonment of a group of Scottish men to the ecstasy of drink comes from the same disturbing quality. The awkwardness of gesture and speech, that can mar the intercourse and manners of both, are the signs of a violent and still imperfectly controlled impetuous nature. The shyness, the rudeness, the tenderness, the loyalty, the friendliness, the caution, the meanness, the generosity of the race have as their motive force the passion which underlies the whole Scottish character, and which is the danger as well as the proudest gift which

it possesses. There is no one so upright as the Scots puritan : no one so abandoned as the Scots libertine. Both have as their salvation a deep generosity of spirit and their heritage fine, clear, working brains.

To the Edinburgh child brought up in the regular comfort of the New Town, as I had been, the Old Town is a mystery, which he dare not penetrate save by daylight on an "historical" tour accompanied by his preceptors, who take this route to show him the Castle. Of its real life he knows nothing. Rumours reach him of its drunkenness and squalor, and in his controlled parade of the gay Princes Street he will look up at the black and romantic slum which sprawls down the side of the great rock, and expands dimly to the east, with a wonder which may be informed by disgust, if he be virtuous, or by a curious attraction if he have what the "'nineties" used to call, "*la nostalgie de la boue.*" I had left Edinburgh too young and timid ever to have made any serious excursions into this part of the town. In the years which had intervened I had in the course of my somewhat erratic education acquired the nowadays very *démodé* taste for the squalid. Though I love luxury and subtlety of mind, I am always trying to contrast with them the crude colouring and manners which the life of the poor people produces. I am, in any new town in which I find myself, always impatient until I have for one evening, at least, avoided the company of my respectable hosts or surroundings and have explored what is commonly called the "disreputable" parts of the town. I do not think I am vicious or degraded. I have not the sickening conceit to claim "an attraction of opposites." I suppose I could manage to rake up a few platitudinous moral defences for my taste. I might praise the honesty, sincerity, kindliness and vitality of the people I meet upon these expeditions ; perhaps it is a drug ; perhaps it is an escape, perhaps it is to me what the cinema is to the servant-girl—an escape from reality. Nevertheless, I like it, and I know no better praise.

As I (at last after this almost interminable dissertation) penetrated into the "Grassmarket" the red hair of the traditional picture-postcard Scot began to blaze out in a sudden profusion. There was, I soon saw, less of a mixture with foreigners or Southerners in this quarter than in the more prosperous part of the town. The children, true to national tradition, were for the most part barefoot, while the housewives, who clustered, gossiped and shouted at each other on the doorsteps, were all bare-headed and had about their shoulders the inevitable plaid. Their speech was wild and coarsely guttural, with none of that high, excitable, rather pretty tone which betokens the Highlander. For the Highlanders either emigrate, if they leave their hills, or else sink into the industrialism of Glasgow. Only a few are found in Edinburgh.

I remember when I was a boy, I happened to come across, in the High Street, a violent dispute between a policeman and an old plaid-covered wife. The policeman had confiscated a football belonging to her grandson, with which the boy had been playing in the street. I saw the old woman come storming out of one of the narrow closes and shriek at the policeman the most astonishing curses as she told him to give back the ball. Her fury was alarming to look at, but the policeman gave her as good as he got, and the high-pitched screaming of the battle was a sound which could never have been heard in an English street row. A crowd began to collect, and the policeman was more than ever angry. In his excitement he lost his English for the moment, and lapsed into Gaelic. Instantly the old woman saw her advantage. She, too, was a Highlander, and her tone as she, too, seized upon the common language became that soft, high, whinnying thing which you always hear when a Celt is pleading. The effect was immediate, with an emotional gesture of surrender the policeman at once gave back the ball.

I soon found some steps that led steeply and narrowly up into the High Street, and lodging halfway up this

flight there was perched a small and peculiarly intimate tavern. The position and appearance of this alcoholic eyrie was very promising, and upon entering I was not disappointed. I suppose I ought to have been disgusted and, indeed, in retrospect I am : for drunkenness, and the spectacle of passionate men inflamed in any way, is not really pleasant. It is quite horrible to think of the things that drunken men do, especially in Scotland ; but to anyone who is stimulated as I am by infected excitement, to anyone to whom mere wildness in manner is a pleasure, this pub could not have failed to be attractive.

The history of mankind, they say, is shown in the growth of a child. The history (or part of it) of a race is preserved in the habits of the poorer members of it. The paradox of Scotland is the combination of its high intellectual quality and its perpetually present barbarous background. The savage is always nearer to the front of any Scotsman's mind than in an Englishman's. It is not long that he has been controlled. Now in the poorer taverns of Scotland, even before anyone is drunk in them, there is expressed something of this savage element in the race. And it is difficult for anyone who is at all sensitive to enter them without feeling moved to some excitement or disgust.

To my surprise I entered the tavern without any nervousness ; for in England, whenever I venture into a strange place, I have always to overcome this feeling at the start. True, I soon get over it, when as I realize my presence is not resented, and become " quite nice." But sometimes the process of becoming so relieves and exhilarates me so greatly that I leap to the other extreme and, Boswell-like, make a complete ass of myself in my unmannerly abandonment to the pleasures of the moment. I have endured some shocking embarrassments in England because of this failing. I go too much to extremes—I do not really understand the English genius.

In this place, however, I was at once at my ease. I felt that this was a place in which everyone went to

extremes. And even a silent entry and a quiet slinking to a corner was, in a way, an extreme of behaviour which was sympathetic to the atmosphere of the pub. The interior of the tavern was obviously old and had endured the ages without much alteration. The wood had that deeply-stained hue which so often appears in drinking places, and which I like to imagine comes from the influence of spilt or splashed liquor. The walls were hung with more pictures than advertisements—an unusual thing—and though the roof was low and the room not very large, there were parts of it partitioned off so as to provide privacy for the alcoholic disputants of some delicate point. The faces of the drinkers pleased me ; most of them were intelligent ; and this quality, predominant through the passion and the violence of the expressions which they assumed as their owners discussed, jeered, condoled, expostulated or extravagantly praised, prevented that death-like looseness which so frighteningly descends upon the more torpid, the less vital faces of those Anglo-Saxons who have abandoned themselves to some form of dissipation.

I caught something of the conversation around me. It was, though forced out in jets of speech, really remarkably intelligent and, for a public-house discussion what was so extraordinary, each disputant did not merely pursue his own train of thought, moving farther and farther away from his opponents', but paid some kind of grudging attention to what was said to him and made an attempt to deal with his opponents' points.

The glory of English pub argument is that it gives wings to the imagination, to the latent poetry of the race. Each arguer, though there be as many as a dozen, floats off on a peculiar line of thought : the only effect of the other's speech is the murmuring stimulation of sound to moving thought. The sense of it has no importance. The setting of the scene and the harmony of the gentle noises of dispute have every importance. In this way are the poets made. Scottish argument—and some of the

best of it has taken place in Scottish pubs—is coherent and contained in one channel, one direction. Though the disputants may fight, struggle, cry out with impatience, or surrender angrily, they cling together and are impelled, one furious group, in the same way by the same wind of thought. In this way are the theologians and philosophers made.

This I understood for the first time as I watched my fellow-tipplers talking around me. I was interested to see that the predominant colour in the scene was red. Apart from the fair sprinkling of red heads, nearly everyone wore some kind of red neck muffler or red ornament. The dark stained woodwork of the room seemed to have deep in it some initial red as a basis. The fumes, the colours, the life, quickly inflamed the spectator with a wish to join in the scene ; and so, without much difficulty, I attached myself to a group of young men who were involved in some excitable laughter near the end of the bar. I said something that pleased them—it was a piece of luck that I had it on the tip of my tongue : some laughed ; the others liked the aptness of the stupid vulgar, unprintable little remark. At any rate, one of them, with one of those violent gestures to which I was beginning to grow accustomed, drove the group of us to one of the partitioned-off tables where, leaning our heads over the table and the tumblers of whisky, we discussed, until seeing that time was getting on, and that I must go if I were to explore any more, I slipped out on an excuse and was in the cool of the High Street in two minutes.

It would, I think, be as impertinent to launch out on a piece of fine writing about the High Street as to repeat the hackneyed description of Princes Street. And yet it is inadequate merely to say that I walked down the High Street. There are some things so often described and gushed over that the essential quality of them becomes more and more obscured, more shy ; and the sensible observer coming upon them is surprised by the discovery

to him—subtle and sensible fellow that he is—of things which none of the facile gushers had thought fit to mention. I will not, therefore, add one more to the innumerable guide-book panegyrics of this celebrated thoroughfare ; but I will say that upon this return of mine to what I remembered only dimly, and had previously seen only in the most proper, and therefore blinkering, circumstances, I was deeply impressed. True, the excitement I had enjoyed might, in the eyes of thoughtless people, have laid me open to the charge of being maudlinly generous towards anything that came before me ; but the intelligent observer would, I think, have seen that, my mind released and my heart beating high, I was just keenly alive to, and happy in the midst of, my surroundings. The quality that most impressed me was the colourful foreignness of this Royal street. The poor people, anywhere in the British Isles, have the delightful faculty of adding colour to their surroundings. But, in England, even the colours of the Cockneys bear upon them the influence of the softening English air, and blend with one another in a very pretty and innocent way. It is difficult to account for or even to describe this quality in English colouring. Even when colours in England are in theory violently contrasting, provided they are truly English they combine and do not contest. This quality of English colouring is well shown in the contrast, say, of yellow laburnum against a summer sky, of croquet-balls on a lawn, of Cockneys' scarves, of the colours of the Eton Ramblers, and of the girls' frocks at Lord's. All these things in France or Germany would be somehow different. There is something softening to colours in the English air. Therefore, when in streets, clothes, or manners, the English see the colours leaping out of the background and struggling against one another for life, they describe them as foreign. And, since I am writing in English (not that I can write properly in any other language) I have used the word " foreign."

The houses in the High Street were not, of course,

coloured ; they remained the tall, black, mediæval-looking clusters that they were when they were built, and which remind one of those neglected south or middle German towns wherein the darker side of the Middle Ages still seems to linger on in stone. The eating-shops, the pubs, the clothes hanging out in the evening air from the top-storey windows to dry, the faces, gestures, and cries of the people glowed and lived, with colours that were as un-English as anything that the most violent Anglophobe would wish to see.

As the High Street, or the Royal Mile as it is sometimes called, descends to Holyrood Palace, it also narrows and darkens. The more dirty and drunken of its inhabitants seem to sink to this end, and the pubs increase and become more wild in their names and appearances. The air of the place is, late on a Saturday evening, definitely frightening ; not so much because of any fear one may feel for one's safety, but because the feeling of abandonment dominates the atmosphere too much to leave it comfortable, and the sight of so much energy being flung into the air, there to expend itself in a waste of shame, appals more than pleases.

It would be easy to compare this street to many imaginary places. But for me it recalled a street I once stumbled across in Avignon. The old part of Avignon, like the old part of Edinburgh, is, in spite of tourists and guide-books, astonishingly mediæval. Clustering round the north side of the superbly tall white palace of the Popes there are a hundred little aimless streets, some of them lying close under the walls. I had often wandered through these in daytime and had been charmed by the lazy air of corrupt meditation that hung over them. At night, they seemed to me merely dull and ill-lit ; the poor people, as well as the bourgeois, of an evening deserted this quarter and disported in the inevitable 1860 Place de la République, which lay in the new part of the town. One evening, however, lost in this maze of alleys and fountain courts, I happened to pass the entrance to a

street that glowed with colours, and at once drew the attention away from the dark and sober little surrounding by-ways. Before entering the street I decided to stand for a moment and admire the scene. Far above, in the background, the splendid severity of the palace walls lost themselves in the deep blue Provençal night ; around me the little irregular houses huddled together as if for protection beneath that guardian building ; while the lights from the animated street before me threw just enough illumination on the scene to set the sentimental mind off on a track of musing, of thinking how the sweet disorder of these little domestic houses, contrasting with the strength of that soaring building, expressed the beauty of the mediæval spirit.

I have always been very thankful that my philosophic guardian angel has had the brutal good sense to intrude upon any sentimentality that I have indulged in some heavily unsentimental fact. On this occasion he achieved his purpose by making me suddenly realize the nature of the "warm, comfortable" little street that had set me off on these meditations. It was what was known in old English as a "Stew." As I understood this fact and suddenly saw the whole business face to face—I was then hardly more than a schoolboy—the colours of the lights which had so warmed me, the age and ricketiness of the houses which had so charmed me, became the elements in the scene which most horrified me. The Middle Ages assumed a very different aspect to me as I stood looking at this brightly-lighted street, sheltered under the white and soaring walls of the great building behind it. The remoteness, the cruelty, the filth, the inhumanity—all fancied, and without any justification save nineteenth-century history books—of the past came up before me and swamped my inconstant mind.

As I gained the crowded and narrowing end of the Edinburgh High Street I was reminded of that "Rue aux Nymphes" at Avignon, but did not, as at Avignon, turn and flee ; instead, I entered another pub just outside

Holyrood gates. Here, under the pressure of that drunkard-making Drink Hours Restriction Act, I had to go through the disgusting performance of "putting down" about three drinks in five minutes. Naturally, this made my head swim rather unpleasantly ; and the stimulating racket of the "last five minutes of drinks" combined with the colours, fumes and general excitement and squalor so far confused me that I ventured to address a really appalling old drunkard on my left (whose friendly gestures I afterwards discovered were covering his theft of a ten-shilling note from my coat pocket), and asked him whether he believed in God. With, I will swear, perfectly genuine emotion, he loudly proclaimed his faith ; he was a Deist of no particular sect and was, I think, shocked that the question should have been put to him at all. He asked me how I imagined he could enjoy getting drunk if he did not believe in God. At this I was humiliated, and admitted that I had misjudged his humanity of spirit. He was charmed with my reply, asked me to stay with him, and was, I think, just on the point of offering to lend me half a crown out of my own ten shillings when the bar closed violently, and we were expelled into the black old street, where, alas ! the douche of fresh cool air falling about him silenced, if not incapacitated, him for the night.

Myself, however, was refreshed by the night air and, escaping from the inevitable knot that always forms on the pavement outside a pub that has at ten o'clock disgorged its contents, I moved northwards through one of the wynds and closes towards the George IV Bridge and Princes Street. Now for the famous Leith Walk, I thought. Leith Walk, where the naughtier bourgeoisie of Edinburgh disport themselves. Leith Walk, the beloved promenade of the lady police and the would-be dashing student—the Coventry Street of Edinburgh.

Leith Walk was both entertaining and disappointing. The naughtiness was, as I had anticipated, very much hidden away : what one could see of it was peculiarly

unattractive, unsmiling and ungraceful, but it lacked that detestable accompaniment of vice in England—slyness. What one could see of it was at least honest, if rather coarsely honest. On the whole, the appearance of the street was dull, except for here and there flashes of the foreign brilliance of colour which I had detected in the High Street. The reason of this element was, however, not far to seek ; for such places of entertainment as remained open after ten o'clock were all Italian delicacy and ice-cream shops. These were furnished opulently, almost extravagantly, and were lit in the most brilliant way. Inside they presented a strangely mixed effect : the *décor*, the playing of the band, every physical circumstance combined to give a promise of a thoroughly gay and amusing place. The men were in their own way rather smartly dressed and the women, if not beautiful gave the impression of being well-fed and clothed in dresses that kept them comfortable. The immense variety of soft drinks were served in the most attractive way, and were coloured as brilliantly as the surroundings and the lights. But—and, indeed, it was the most depressing " but "—the gloomy faces of the drinkers and players were at once ridiculous and saddening ; ridiculous, in contrast with their background and because anything pompously uncomfortable is always laughable ; saddening, because the gloom represented that lack of courage in pleasure, that fear of being laughed at which is the curse of the Scottish middle class.

There is nothing in the world so " refined " as the Scottish urban middle class that is now springing up. The complaint of internationalism—or Americanization, if you prefer that word—has invaded the Scots middle class as much as it has any other middle class. Its youth, abandoning the dignified, if bleak and unprepossessing, seclusion of its fathers, with the hard and equally unprepossessing belief which inspired their attitude, has tried to impart something of the glitter of the pleasure of the South into its life. In one way it does it well, for

these young men and women certainly had everything of the best around them ; there was none of that lamentable meanness of effect which goes with the cheaper forms of London pleasure. The place was very comfortable. But those gloomy faces took the sting out of the whole affair. They were the signs of the remains of a puritanism embedded in the minds of these people by four hundred years' subjection. Though with these bright lights and this undignified music they defied the past, their fathers from out that past peered through their eyes and compressed their mouths into involuntary shapes of disapproval.

In Scotland one is always comparing one's surroundings with France, to discover now differences, now close similarities ; and once again, in the same evening, my mind went back to the second best country in the world, and, indeed, to the same town on which I had meditated when I was at the Canongate—Avignon. There is something in Avignon that calls for comparison with Edinburgh. This time I thought, and I was cheered as I thought, of a very different part of that city. Avignon has in its centre a rock, like the Edinburgh one, expelled high from the surrounding plain. It is white, tall, severe, and commands a magnificent view of that old open Provençal valley, with the Rhone winding its swift way through the dark green olive trees and vineyards. On the top of this rock the townspeople have laid out a pleasure garden, in which, in the summer, they find an excuse at least once a fortnight to hold a fête. It may be the Fête de la République or St. John's Day, or one of many other excuses for gaiety ; but whichever it be, either Christian or Republican, the same people flock up the heights, past the great white walls of the palace and go through the same easy reality-obscuring antics of pleasure.

Nothing in the world that I have encountered is so graceful or easy or ridiculous as these fêtes. [One laughs at the Avignon pleasure-seekers, but one laughs

in a very different way from that in which one laughs at the Edinburgh bourgeois pleasure-seekers. True, there is the same element of dignity in an absurd light in each ; for on every fête day, M. Z——, a local bourgeois celebrity, parades through—indeed, pervades—the whole scene with his splendid and ridiculous presence, which in a fantastic way calls up the same kind of laughter as that which one enjoys in the North. He is always to be seen on the centre paths, with his wife on one arm and a small cane depending from the other. He wears a magnificent beard, and a straw hat, and, as he passes, the idiotically gallant young men, the mannered old ladies, the pretty girls, all pay tribute to him in their respectful and *gentil* greetings. The dark green foliage hangs over the paths which are illuminated by the swinging fairy lamps ; everything prettily surrounds and contrasts with M. Z——'s progress ; at every few steps the arm with the cane pendant from it rises to sweep off the straw hat, which discovers an egg-bald head to evening air. On the evening on which I had the honour of meeting M. Z——, I was embarrassed by the breadth of the gestures with which it seemed necessary to remove one's hat. I swept mine as low as my knees. I held it as far from me as possible, but never did I achieve quite that uncoveredness which it seemed proper to assume in M. Z——'s presence. I wondered if I could convince him of my respect for him and of my desire to be polite if I abandoned my hat altogether, cast it away from me into the ornamental water or over the edge of the rock. Instead, I held it as low as possible and bowed till it swept the dust, and only dared to raise it a few inches when Madame Z—— said to me : "*Couvrez-vous, Monsieur, je vous en prie.*" Yes, there is an element in M. Z——'s dignity which corresponds to the dignity of the pompous Edinburgh pleasure-seekers. But the contrast of the ordinary people of the French town and the ordinary people in the ice-cream shops in Leith Walk was the thing that leapt out to the front of my mind. With the rather pathetic,

grim, determined faces of the young people around me in Edinburgh my mind flew for refuge to that pleasure-garden on the rock, high above the Provençal plain, where the fountains played into funny little artificial pools, where the lights swung and twinkled in the dying and now inoffensive Mistral, where the fireworks fizzled and gleamed every few minutes ; where shallow, amusing young men were continually pouring out cheap champagne into irritatingly shallow glasses ; where girls, who (for one enchanted by the scene), were unbelievably pretty, laughed, smiled, talked, passed from the shadow into the light and into the shade again, came easily and gracefully to one's whispered salutation, and as easily eluded it a moment later. I can at any moment recall the scene of those fêtes : the scents, the sounds, the colour of the night, the taste of the sweet champagne ; and with the revocation there always falls upon my mind that essential quality of those Southern entertainments—the drugging sense that nothing in the world matters save cheap wines, pretty lights, ancient walls, lips that are soft as moths' wings and fly as easily when touched, ridiculous bearded bank managers with rococo manners and wives dependent from the right arm. Even in the ice-cream shop in Leith Walk the image of those Provençal evenings began to make me feel this delicious sense. But as I looked round at my dear unfortunate compatriots enjoying their night out, I could see that everything in the world mattered intensely to them and, most of all, it mattered to them that they should not look ridiculous—which they all did, and which, no doubt, I myself did, also.

III

I AWOKE on Sunday morning with rather a muzzy head, for the cheap whisky did not suit my digestion, which had been tired out at the end of a day's tramping. I looked round on the little room—or partitioned space rather—

which I occupied, with some disgust. The morning sun displayed its fly-blown, musty appearance and there was in the air that heavy unmistakable smell of unwashed sheets. I had, in my sleep, been bitten by fleas, which I had either picked up in my wanderings on the previous night or which had forestalled me in the occupation of the bed. I am unusually unfortunate with fleas. The irritation of a bite from one of them lasts longer with me than with most people. For at least three days after the bite I am sensible of its presence, and in the evenings, as my blood heats, the little wound inflames in the most maddening way. I am also unusually attractive to fleas. This is, I hasten to add, due only to some very delightful quality in my blood. It is looked upon by fleas as vintage blood and can by them be distinguished from afar off. If I were at a crowded meeting in the Albert Hall, and there were one flea in the building as far from me as possible, in a very few minutes it would find its way to me, leaping, skipping gladly over the heads of the populace.

I looked round upon my partition, as I say, with disgust. I had been too tired and preoccupied on the previous evening to notice its unpleasantness. I was also depressed by my own disgust, for I disapproved of it. I disapproved of myself for being excited by romantic and colourful squalor, and then being so easily repelled by the more drab side of the same thing. To add to my annoyance, the landlady, as she called me at the required time, came into the room and took rather a high line about young men who keep late hours and come in noisily when they are staying in respectable houses. I endured her rebukes in silence and merely asked her what time it was, so that I should not be late for Mass. So far from mollifying her this seemed to infuriate her all the more. "Hypocrisy," she called it. "Popish hypocrisy. Sin and do what you like, then go and get forgiven on the next day. It's a good thing we don't all have a religion like that."

I was foolish enough to protest against this time-

honoured accusation. I pointed out that I was not going to Confession, and that even if I had been, it was surely better to do something after sinning than merely to make a few vague gestures Heavenward and then dismiss the matter from your mind. In a moment we were involved in a religious argument, which, had I not been so irritated, I could easily have avoided. However, I let her babble on in her thick, guttural voice, and only managed to get her out of the room by telling her that as I had no pyjamas, and was only wearing a shirt, I could not get up while she was in the room. This she somehow managed to look upon as an unpleasant remark and slammed out of the room in a temper.

I decided not to have breakfast in the repulsive little restaurant on the ground floor. So, having slung my rucksack on my back, and having paid my night's lodging and apologized to the old woman for any unintentional rudeness, I walked over to the rather drab little Cathedral which is the main Catholic place of worship in Edinburgh. I was interested to notice, after these many years in the South, that the congregation in a Catholic church in Scotland acts much more in unison than the English and French ones do. In the South of England, and more so in France, the members of the congregation are all happily unaware of each other at Mass. Some of them stand, some sit, some kneel, and right up to the moment of consecration they are either loudly jabbering away at their own prayers or asking each other out to lunch in the most audible way. I have noticed, however, that the farther North you go, the more are the congregations controlled by the actions and words of the priest. It may be due to the influence of Protestantism on the national mind, but I think it is more probably a product of the greater self-consciousness of the Northern people, of the desire not to appear odd or to act differently from others. In those districts where the Celtic strain becomes predominant, the worship becomes more individual ; but even there it is controlled by the

central figure—and Heaven knows what would be the result if it were not, for the capacity for emotional worship among the Celts is so great that it can be alarming.

In Westminster Cathedral, in London, at the twelve o'clock Mass, the place is filled with wandering and standing worshippers. Those Protestants who come to see the service are all seated. I heard once that a well-known Catholic was standing at the back of the Cathedral leaning against a pillar during Mass, when a verger came up and asked him if he would like a seat. As no reply was made, the verger thought he had not been heard, and repeated the question. All he got was : "Damn you, go to Hell!" "I beg your pardon, sir," said the verger, retiring in confusion, "I didn't know you were a Catholic."

After Mass I refreshed myself by douching my head, neck and arms beneath the pump in the back yard of an hotel ; and then, having made a light breakfast, set out on my journey to the Highlands.

Princes Street looked very fine in the prim morning air, and I was soon exhilarated by the freshness of the early summer day and threw off the poisons of yesterday evening. The shops in Princes Street are in some ways the best I have ever seen. They have a very limited stock of things, but what they have is always of the very best quality and is very well displayed to you. It is an extraordinary thing that the joke about the Scotsmen's meanness should have had such popularity, for one of the first things any visitor—and there are thousands who come shopping in Princes Street every year—notices when he buys from a Scotsman is the generosity with which he is treated. The less easily discovered generosity of the Scot, as shown in his famous hospitality, his loyalty, etc., one can understand escaping the casual traveller ; but it is astonishing to me, especially as I look at the shops in Princes Street, how this common commercial generosity is not more widely noticed. It is everywhere. You get a larger glass than in England when you ask for a drink.

You get more cakes to your shilling tea. Your bread is cut thicker ; there is more butter on the table. The goods you take away with you are wrapped in thicker paper and stouter string. You are often waited upon without being expected to give a tip. Even when you are shaved, the amount of soap used to lather your chin is astonishing—almost uncomfortable—and you only realize the benefit of such a perfect lather when you feel the razor slide like a tightly stretched silk thread across your face.

When I left Princes Street I had to pass through the respectable and residential part of Edinburgh. I felt out of place, for I was dressed for the road and not the street. It amused me, as I quickly traversed this part, to think how much of Edinburgh I was missing upon this tour of mine, and how inadequate a guide reference my remarks in this town would be save to those who had a hankering after the disreputable. I thought of all the " beauty " and " romantic " spots which it is the custom to dwell upon, and which are rightly the pride of the Edinburgh citizens. I felt slightly ridiculous for not having seen one of them ; but consoled myself by the reflection that I had had quite enough of them in my childhood and that what I had enjoyed last night were the rarer pleasures of Edinburgh.

I left Edinburgh by Murrayfield—a pleasant suburb—and passed along under Corstorphine Hill on the Glasgow road. My direction was now almost due west, for not until far up is the River Firth bridged or fordable, and I had as my objective channel for the North the famous bridge at Stirling. Shortly after Corstorphine I left the Glasgow road and branched up slightly northwards by Kirkliston. Now began, as I suppose, a kind of compensation for my pleasure and excitement of the previous evening, the most dreary and painful part of my whole journey. I am told that I am not just to the Lowlands of Scotland, that I do not understand them, and that their character is delicate, hidden, and not easily appreciated

by the casual traveller. This may be so. But I am sure that there is something wrong with the character of any place that can present so depressing an appearance to any traveller as the country between Edinburgh and Stirling did to me on my walk. It is partly an industrial and mining district, and near the sides of the road there are to be frequently seen those cone-like piles of slag and other dirty grey matter. The countryside has lost the rich, comfortable domesticity of the South, but has not gained the grandeur of the North. As I walked along towards Linlithgow, through the depressing rain that had now begun to blow in my face, I thought how like the appearance of this country was to that of the land round Berlin, which one sees from the railway—all cabbage-fields and factory chimneys.

There is, for the traveller on foot here, none of those consolations by the wayside, the country pubs, which are so lavishly sprinkled over the South of England. The Scottish genius does not produce this kind of thing. Further North, in the Highlands, there is the inn—and a very fine kind of inn, too—but it is more of a sheltering place for the night than a pub. It is hospitable, comfortable, delightful to rest in at the end of a heavy day, but it is certainly not the place in which to have a glass of beer during a short interval on your journey. I wondered, therefore, where I should be able to take my midday rest and be able to buy a bit of bread and cheese. I eventually got to a dreary collection of stone houses, black and gleaming in the rain, and amongst these I found a depressing kind of station bar sort of a pub, in which I ordered some bread and cheese and a bag of potato crisps. The landlord served me slowly, and replied to my opening remarks with that shy reserve which to one accustomed to the more genial warmth of the South looks so like suspicion. This I was prepared for and felt I could overcome. I know too well in my own nature that sense of reserve in the presence of a stranger which can come over any Scotsman so suddenly. It is the result of

being a member of a small race that has always had to struggle for its independence and whose enemies have always lain in the South. What, however, I was not prepared for, and which added the last touch of depression to my morning, was that when I did succeed in getting into conversation with the landlord and some people at the bar, I was taken for an American. I suppose I ought to have been flattered : for to be as like an American as possible is the average young man's ideal nowadays. The centre of glamorous snobbery has moved since the nineteenth century from Paris to New York. But I was for some strange reason not flattered, and wearily let the mistake rest without correcting it while I finished up my bread and cheese.

The question of the English attitude towards America is an odd one to-day. American habits and manners are fast gaining ground in England, and you very seldom hear anyone saying he dislikes America or the inhabitants ; and yet book after book pours from the publishers ever year, written by every conceivable kind of person who has ever crossed the Atlantic, saying how kind the Americans are, how generous, how misunderstood, how young, how full of ideals and, above all, how unjust the English opinion of them. If ever there was an instance of " bringing coals to Newcastle " it is this pæan of praise of America on the part of the English travellers. Coals are, however, bought in Newcastle, and I suppose these books must sell well in England. Nevertheless, I was saddened by being taken for an American in my native country, and left the pub to plod on my rainy way with a dull heart.

It was evening by the time I reached Linlithgow, for I was not walking fast. I was wet without and damp within my clothes, for it had been a muggy day, and I looked for lodgings in an uneasy perspiration. As I did so, I thought of a funny instance of Edinburgh " refinement," which my condition called to my mind. Edinburgh " refinement " is, unlike the London kind, always betraying itself by ridiculously coarse lapses, which the

native savageness is responsible for. Perhaps one of the most absurd of these of which I have heard was the opening gambit made to a friend of mine who had picked up a girl at an Edinburgh *palais de danse*. After they had revolved or shuffled round the floor for a bit, the young woman astonished him by saying : " Do you perspaire ? I do, freely."

I thought it might not be a bad idea to defeat the Fates by voluntarily pressing forward my miserable and uncomfortable circumstances as far as possible—and incidentally saving money—by spending the night, instead of in lodgings, in the station waiting-room. However, a moderately good dinner at a fish shop restored my strength and my spirits, and, as the weather began slightly to improve under the influence of the evening, I decided to walk from the town and see if I could get lodgings by the wayside. About three miles out I came on a farm, where, for a very moderate charge, I was given a night's rest in a huge four-poster bed. The bedroom was a perfect museum of Victorian pieces, which rather pleased me. The hangings, carpet and rugs all were of that heavy green or plum colour which was so loved in the last century ; and as I dozed off in this amusingly ugly room, I was charmed to think of the many whiskered heads that had lain on the pillow end of this bed and gratefully lapsed into dreams of an easier age than the present one.

Needless to say, it was raining again on the next day. Masses of heavy clouds lay between me and the north and east, so that the consoling view of the great hills to which I was so painfully making my way was hidden from me. When I reached and had passed through Falkirk, I decided that at all costs I must get out of this slough of despond as quickly as possible and reach Stirling. I refused to allow myself to use the train, for it was a rather affected caprice of mine to undertake this journey as much like a professional road man as possible and never to pay my transport. So, by means of shouts and gestures, I began to solicit a lift from all

passing cars. At length one of them slowed up and the driver, a fat, kindly-looking, smartly dressed young bounder, invited me to step in. How far was I going ? Stirling. Good ! that was where he was making for.

I like bounders. I get on well with them. They are often extremely good company, and, if they are of the good old-fashioned type of bounder, pictures of whom one sees in the back volumes of " Punch," they are sometimes faithful and amusing friends. They become difficult when they start ordering servants about, or when they get drunk or begin to argue in a public place, but alone, they can be charming. And here note that I am talking about the bounder—not the cad. The cad is of necessity offensive, bullying, possibly clever and efficient, but quite thoughtless and selfish. The bounder is simply a good-natured man in hopelessly bad taste. Most commercial travellers are bounders ; most politicians are cads.

I looked, therefore, with some approval upon my companion who had been so kind as to give me a lift. He wore a tight-fitting, very light grey suit, and a yellow and red club tie. His shoes were light brown, his waistcoat double-breasted, and his neat little Homburg hat was slightly on one side. His appearance proclaimed him to be a bounder, but until he spoke I was uncertain to what particular school of thought in bounderdom he subscribed. I did not think he could be Scottish, for the Scottish bounder would have looked more heavy, less glossy, and would have worn a different kind of clothes. His first words soon enabled me to place him. He glanced at my rather rough clothes ; and so, in half-explanation, half-apology, I told him I was on a walking tour Northwards by myself.

" How too marvellous ! " was his answer, with a heavy nasal accent on the first syllable of " marvellous."—He was the æsthetic bounder : a type in which I specialize.

The term " æsthetic bounder " requires some explanation. Up to and for a year or two after the War æstheticism was at the Universities an esoteric cult ; the

people who indulged in it had to have some strength of personality ; they were very much in the minority ; they were neither socially high nor low, but were drawn—such numbers as they had—from all classes in the University. However, about 1922, it came into more powerful hands at Oxford. Some of the more amusing and the more socially impeccable of the post-War undergraduates took to it ; and soon, though it might be an intellectual sneer to call a man an æsthete, it became almost social praise. About two years later, the forcible disbanding of that very delightful club, the Hypocrites, precipitated the whole business.

It was to Oxford what the taking of Constantinople was to Europe. It diffused the culture. This was just about the time of the celebrated " Oxford Trouser " boom which swept over England. Now these trousers were in the first instance entirely the product of the æsthetic group at Oxford. Someone in the group had designed the first pair. The group had worn them and made them popular. Their popularity amongst the bounders of London was, of course, due to a desire to imitate Oxford. And so it was not surprising that hot on the heels of this sartorial imitation there followed the imitation of social manner.

The scraps of conversation picked up from the young University men at the Alhambra promenade were diligently repeated, and soon all over London one could hear those old familiar *clichés* which had once been the sole prerogative of the then oppressed minorities at Oxford, Cambridge and Chelsea. These *clichés* are well-known and easily imitated, most of us have seen them in the back volumes of *Punch* and have, indeed, ourselves used them. They are made up of extravagant forms of speech, the piling-on of adjectives, and the drawling accentuation of some favoured syllable.

Of course, only a section of the London bounders took up the Oxford trouser fashion, and so only a section took up the æsthetic mode of speech. Those who did so had

in mind a vague idea of what they were aiming at. They knew that this was hardly the way that an Army officer talked, that a country squire conversed. They vaguely knew that there was something "artistic" or "highbrow" mixed up in it. Their object was to be what the daily press in London calls the "Bright Young People," and so only the more mentally agile of them adopted this pose, which has now, however, become fairly widespread.

The æsthetic bounder is, as I have said, my speciality. I knew exactly the kind of thing that would please him for me to say, and I said it. I hinted at the life of high pleasure led by me in London and affected a great relief to be by myself tramping in the country. I mentioned rather flashy names as my acquaintances—people of whom I was sure he would have read in the gossip columns of the Press, and was delighted to hear how ingeniously he said that he had met them at so-and-so's party or at such-and-such a first night. One or two I think he did actually know, and I could usually spot these by his parrot-like cry which he appended to their names. "Oh yes, dear X, isn't he too, too marvellous?" or else, "Dear Y, isn't she just sweet?" and so on.

I was very tactful about not enquiring too much into his circumstances, or asking why he was in Scotland. He informed me, later on, that he was going up North to shoot. I was not so foolish as to ask why he was going up to Scotland to shoot in the middle of June; but the oddity of the remark must have struck him, for he added rather lamely after a short pause, "—er, only rabbits, of course."

When we got to Stirling he insisted on my having dinner with him, for it appeared that he was not engaged until eleven o'clock, when he had to meet a train from the South.

Dinner in the saloon of a large comfortable hotel was rather embarrassing, for his loud, fat, little English voice penetrated to the farthest corner of the room and drew

attention to our odd-looking table. I was very ill-dressed for so swagger a place, and my dusty and bedraggled appearance contrasted foolishly with his oily prosperity. It was one of his better qualities that he did not seem to mind my shabbiness. Or, perhaps he liked it for showing up his own splendour.

Apart from the appearance question, which was really not very troublesome, he had one terrifying habit : that of discussing everyone in the room and laughing at the Scottish accent of the waiters. He must have known that everyone could hear him, and it is inconceivable that any human being could not have felt that slow, cold, ponderous contempt which the Scots people can exude from themselves in all directions, and especially in the presence of flighty Englishmen. Nevertheless, he persisted, while I blushed deeper and deeper, until by a lucky turn I deflected the conversation into safer channels.

My agony of embarrassment was not so much for myself but for him, for I credited the room with sufficient good sense to be able to perceive that I was not enjoying this exhibition. But I am one of those unfortunate people who blush for others, by proxy. When an actor forgets his lines, I grow warm and uncomfortable in my stall. When a maudlin fellow who has strayed into sensible company begins to sentimentalize I blush for him, almost as much as if I had committed the *gaffe* myself. Even when no one seems to be aware of the fault I sometimes find myself made uncomfortable by another's foolishness, as for instance, when a preacher at a revivalist meeting indulges in an orgy of religious emotion which obviously goes down well with the crowd.

After dinner I had proposed to myself that we should wander about the town, but I perceived that, under the genial influence of the food and wine, my friend had become even more boisterous, and as we repaired to the hotel bar his familiarity became rather more pressing than was comfortable. So tactfully rejecting his invitation to have a walk round the place and look for a " couple of

bits," I suggested to him that we should take a run in the car in the neighbouring country until ten o'clock, at which hour I told him I must go to bed. I refused to let him take me Northwards, for nothing would induce me to enter the Highlands, save on foot, and least of all in my kindly little acquaintance's company. So we wandered rather vaguely southwards and branched off the road we had come by.

After a short time the rain and mist began to drive in from the east, and so we struck back for the main road. We got rather lost and apparently reached the main road sooner than we supposed. Stopping at a village which, in the dusk and rain I did not recognize, we had to ask the way for the Stirling road. The old man to whom we made our enquiries answered in a very pawky and cautious way. I forget what he said, but I know that he replied to most of our questions in the good old Scots' way, by asking another. In a moment or two, the ritual over, he would have put us on our way, but my companion lost his patience, and rather rudely said in his most affected Southern voice, " Can't you see, we're lost. If you can't have the sense to direct us back, tell us where we are now and we can find our way."

The old man quickly replied, " Y're lost wheer y're freends were lost afore ye, laddie. Y're at Bannockburn." Whereat I loudly applauded, and my companion, as we continued, ventured on the remark that the old man was " too marvellous."

When we got back to Stirling I managed to get rid of the little man by saying I was very sleepy, but as soon as I had left him at the hotel bar I walked as quickly as I could towards Stirling Bridge—the famous bridge on which Wallace defeated the English—with the idea of making a few miles Northward that night. The evening was now less wet and tempestuous, the streets were quickly emptying and looked clean and fresh. To the north there still lay the sullen bank of clouds which I supposed I should have to penetrate on the morrow, but the fading evening

light was still strong enough to show me the castle rock and the hill on the right side of the town, which bears the Wallace memorial (for once, not a bad thing).

Stirling was the last outpost of the Lowlands in the days when the Highlands were still unsubdued. It is rocky, fortified and river defended. Even the plains around the town, with the sluggish Forth wandering through them, seem somehow aware that they lie under the shadow of the Hills. At this time of night when the 'buses had left the streets and even the good bourgeois were in their houses, the grey unattractive old town seemed to slip back a few centuries in time, and I felt in the atmosphere the mountain air, which in the busier daytime is obscured by the dust, the bustle and the petrol fumes.

Near the north end of the town, just before it loses itself in the fields I saw the lights of an inn which tempted me not to continue my journey any farther that night. When I got up to the inn I found that it was only a small pub, built rather in the English style than the Scottish. I knew it could not be open for drinks at this hour of the evening, but its appearance and the sound of voices from within encouraged me to knock on the door, which was almost immediately opened. Standing in the light of a lantern, which swung from the roof, I saw a huge man with a shock of luxuriant hair that even the dim illumination discovered to be flaming red.

" Can ye give me a bed for the night, sir ? " I cried rather loudly, for from his wild manner I thought he was a little drunk. " I don't mind where or how I sleep."

He looked at me for a few seconds and then said in a high, soft voice, " Come away in, ma wee friend."

I was led into a back room, where through a cloud of tobacco smoke I saw about half a dozen men drinking and arguing loudly. My host asked me what it was that I wanted and as I thought it would be rude to refuse, though I did not want anything, I asked for a rum. I soon saw that this was no offer, that I was expected to pay for it. The red Scotsman noticed my momentary hesitation as I

tried to get the atmosphere, and then said, " You're a freend o' Wally Tamson, are ye no' ?"

I disclaimed all knowledge of Mr. Thomson and said that I was walking North, had hoped to reach Doune that night, but found that I was too tired, and so had presumed to hope for a lodging in the house where I now found myself.

" Och, y're wanting a bed the night then ? " he asked me, and then laughed loudly so that the argument between the drinkers ceased, and when all eyes were turned upon us the host pointed at me and said, " The wean's wanting a bed the night." I was tired and angry, the rum was in my head, so I answered back at once, " And why the . . . should I no have a bed ? "

" Och now, dear friend," said the eccentric red man, " ye've no need to call down the curses of God on an honest house for a bit o' laughing at ye." He then proceeded to explain that as it was long after drinking hours, and as people staying in hotels were allowed to drink until any hour they pleased, it had become a kind of formula or password for those who wanted a drink late in the evening to knock on the door and ask for lodging for the night.

I soon convinced him that I was in earnest and really wanted a bed, but he was very sorry, but there was no spare bed in the house at all. However, he was anxious to make up for having offended me and actually offered to share his own bed with me, assuring me that I would not get in anywhere else on the road that night. I could, of course, do nothing but accept, as politely as possible, his really generous offer and pray the Almighty and the Saints that the bed might be large. " And noo," he said, as soon as the point was settled, " we'll hae a wee crack. There'll be no ganging to bed for a bit yet."

My friend's notion of a wee crack was to have all glasses filled up with a mixture of spirit and malt and then to demand a song. Someone yelled out some popular favourite to the accompaniment of a melodion. I,

myself, obliged with a French marching song. I sang it execrably and no one understood a word of it, but as I had hoped, it went down very well, for it had an obvious and impetuous rhythm and the tune was very French, which is the same thing as saying that it would appeal to the Scots.

It is on the surface a curious thing this Franco-Scottish alliance, which is something far more profound in the characters of both nations than just the old political alliance. The two nations have always had as common qualities an antipathy for the English and a love of clear logical thought. I am not for a moment saying that the fruits of that logical thought have in the two nations been the same. The logic has, in most instances, led them in opposite directions in philosophy or religion, but each nation has always preserved a respect for the process by which the other has arrived at its conclusions; though it may laugh at or be shocked by those conclusions.

Now as the French live nearer the sun than do the Scots, their blood is richer, their spirit more civilized and so their art is, of course, much more skilful, more plentiful, more respected, than is the art of the Scots. Therefore, though occasionally the wildness, the Celtic mistiness of Scottish verse or song, may appeal to some Gallic strain in the French, all the artistic admiration is (when they will allow themselves to admire it) on the side of the Scots. French art can always be relied on to appeal in Scotland. It is half because of a sense of affinity, half the sense of contrast. In some hidden way the Celt speaks to the Celt, and for the rest it seems that the Scot loves the ordered skill which he perceives in the French spirit, a skill which he not only admires, but feels himself and his descendants to be in a distant way capable of if educated highly enough ; also, perceiving the fever of his more savage nature, he loves to cool his hot hands on the smooth polished metal of the French mind.

This sounds a somewhat ponderous way of explaining why a French marching song went down well in a Scottish country pub ; nevertheless, it is the right

explanation. If I had (and I regret to say I have) tried this same song in an English pub in similar circumstances, it would not have been received with anything like the same enthusiasm. The violent rhythm, the rather jolly melody, even if admirably sung by someone with a good voice, would, I am sure, pass unheeded over the heads of the nice friendly fat people who bloom and smile in the gardens and bar-parlours of, let us say, Buckinghamshire. It is just possible that if any foreign tune were to appeal to them at all, it would be an easy, sentimental German student's song, with plenty of long notes on which the whole company could howl till the last drop of air was out of their lungs and then gasp back again, sufficient for the next few words. That remains to be seen, however. I have never heard of anyone trying a German student's song in a Southern English pub. It would be an interesting experiment.

I have heard a Bohemian or Hungarian fiddler who, for some astonishing reason best known to himself, used to wander about the South of England in the summer-time and play outside pubs. The tunes he played were never very sentimental, but were the quick and luscious dances of his native country, and though the kindly listeners would always give him a copper and, jerking a thumb over the left shoulder, remark, " 'Ark at 'im ; don't he play lovely ? " I am sure they did not care very much for his music.

All this has, of course, no reference to the American tunes which, like the influenza, spread all over the world without any respect of race or rank. But even with the American tunes, the English country folk have an amusingly melancholy way of singing. They always choose the ones which they can drawl out the longest, and on summer Saturday evenings as the chars-à-bancs come banging and rattling home from their outings, the lanes and main roads of Southern England are murmurous with the wail of infinitely protracted songs about mother-love or a negro's nostalgia for the cotton fields.

As the next day was a local holiday the session in the bar parlour lasted well on into the early morning. What with the fumes of tobacco and rum and my tiredness I fell very dead asleep when I eventually got into bed with my landlord who, with the astonishing virility of his class, got up at six o'clock and busied himself with clearing the mess from the evening's debauch.

There had been a quarrel, I dimly remembered, and someone's hand had been badly cut with broken glass. I also remembered that it had struck me as typical of the queer topsy-turvy kind of world in which these people lived, that without any apparent ceremony of reconciliation the fighters had made it up, and later the one who had done the damage actually strummed out an accompaniment on the piano to a song sung by the bleeding warrior.

IV

It was late in the morning before I could get myself out of bed, for my head was muzzy with tiredness and my body sluggish with poison, and I had that horrible feeling of the unreality of all material objects, which I suppose a ghost must feel, but of which all of us have a foretaste after a night out. I cursed myself for allowing myself to be betrayed into this debauch, and for the thousandth time, made the time-honoured resolution that I would really pull myself together and give this sort of thing up. As I dressed and looked out upon the rainy day and the drab landscape of the Forth valley, my mind was full of gloomy thoughts about the wasting of my youth.

The rain was really frightfully depressing, especially in these circumstances, and I even sank so low after one distressing twinge of nausea while I was washing my teeth, to wonder if I should turn back and go South. The thought of the great hills, however, lying behind that bank of clouds refreshed me like a douche of water, and I

descended to drink a cup of tea thirstily and with as resolute a mind as could be expected. The open air and the exercise of walking soon restored me before I was well on my way.

The next day was so drab and uneventful that it is wearisome to recall it—it must be passed over quickly. I was stupid enough to mistake my direction upon leaving Stirling and, instead of making for the most direct route to the Pass of Leny, which was my proposed entry to the Highlands, I went first of all to Dunblane. Here the weather grew so wretched that I thought I would spend the evening in the little town and continue my journey early next morning. I found a house with a room to spare for the night and a very kindly old Scots woman to cook my supper for me. After supper I paid her for my lodging as I told her that I should want to leave very early the next morning, and she showed me how to unfasten the complicated catch on the door.

I fell asleep in my little whitewashed bedroom at about half-past eight and awoke next morning at three. I stole downstairs as quietly as I could and found that the old lady had left a note for me by the door saying that there was hot tea for me in a thermos flask in the kitchen. I drank the tea, invoked the blessing of heaven upon the house and its inhabitants and set forth on the road to Doune.

The very faintest premonition of the day was in the sky and the air was clean with the promise of better weather. The landscape through which I was now passing began to improve in appearance. The drabness, the industrialism of the Linlithgow district had disappeared and was replaced by a romantic loneliness. I could not see far in front of me for, apart from the darkness of the twilight, the road twisted in between clumps of fir trees and the heights of dark, rolling fields. I could still see the great bank of clouds to the north of me as I looked between the trees and the little hillocks.

At last, about a mile or two from Doune the road

emerged from obstructions and ran out into the open plain. As I came to this place the east had begun to glow, and a mild wind from the south was sweeping from the sky all those clouds that did not ornament the birth of day. The north lay clear to me now, and as I looked across the pleasant plains and stretches of pine woods, I realized with a sudden intoxication that what I had taken for a sullen bank of clouds was a range of great hills. There was a cloak of mist about them, but now, in the ascending spirals, it was being absorbed into the day and the lovely sweep of the mountains coming down to the plain was already laid bare.

The nineteenth century has a great deal to answer for, as we are being perhaps too constantly reminded by the apostles of formless freedom. But one of the most serious charges against it, is not so much its too prudish desire to restrain but its uncontrolled emotionalism, its appalling capacity for sloppy, selfish sentiment by means of which it made ridiculous much that is, in the true and original meaning of the words, respectable and sentimental. To make more difficult the task of those who would appreciate these things which have been obscured by this Victorian licence, there have now come on the stage a whole troupe of professional jeerers whose main trick is the laughing at, and the drawing attention to, these failings of our grandparents. It is true that in the appreciations of the men themselves the wind has set in a slightly different direction, and it is now very much *à la mode* to write simpering little brochures that are half sneers, half appreciations, of Tennyson and all the rest of them. But the things these men admired, either reasonably or ridiculously, such as God, great mountains, family life, chastity, these still remain the objects of reactionary scorn and have to be handled carefully.

Now of all Great Mountains which the Victorians (in their somewhat tardy acceptance of Wordsworth) chose to admire, those which they treated most shabbily and rendered most ridiculous, were the Highlands of Scotland.

It is difficult to know why they chose these particular mountains. The Welsh would have done as well or those in the Cumberland district, and would not have been so geographically obscure. I think the reason was partly snobbish ; for the Highlands were supposed to be the playgrounds of the aristocracy and the Court. Also, there was a picturesque romance about them—Prince Charlie, the faithful Highlanders, and all the rest of it : that business being now sufficiently remote to be slopped over without treasonable suspicion attaching to one. The sentimental orgy set in, accompanied by that invariable friend or opposite side of the penny to sentimentality—brutality. The Highland crofters, those who in an anachronistic spirit of independence had clung on to their own bits of land for centuries, were evicted and sent off to America so that London brewers might have good shooting.

The brutality side of the question is luckily somewhat, though not entirely, mended now, but there still remain in most seaside lodgings those innumerable pictures entitled : " Evening on Loch Lomond," " The Monarch of the Glen," and so on, as dreadful relics of the sentimentalization of the Highlands.

It would not, therefore, be easy for me, even should I wish to do so, to launch out on a purple passage on the Highlands and the effect upon me of this approach to them upon an early June morning ; but I cannot forbear saying that I was more " knocked all of a heap," *bouleversé* —if you will—by this sight than by anything I have ever seen. The Highlands have a quite peculiar beauty. There are more brilliant colours on the shores of the Mediterranean, more subtle in an English landscape ; there are higher and more impressive mountains nearer to London than they are ; nevertheless, they have a curious power of suggesting that they combine all these qualities of colour and size more than do any other hills in the world. In them have been bred a people, passionate, romantic, loyal, and possessing the added glamour

of having been scandalously badly treated for generations ; their vigour has, to a great extent, been the life of Scotland, and though the Lowlander would not admit it, there is no part of the country in which their *esprit** is not capable of arousing a half-grudging enthusiasm. Their religion was stolen from them by the simple expedient of killing all priests who could speak their language ; yet they have, in several of the more remote districts, preserved intact and in an unbroken continuity from the days of Saint Columba the faith which in England was lost save amongst individuals. Their caution, their frightened and half-frightening reserve with which they sometimes cloak their native generosity from the Southerners never interferes with their perfect good manners, and has only been imposed upon them by a fear which is not personal, but is the product of race persecution.

The sea has eaten long channels into the fabric of these mountains and given a fresh mystery and complexity to their form, at the same time introducing into the character of a part of the inhabitants an element of the sailor quality which is always an added fascination in any people. The great spaces and heights give a sense of freedom quite incompatible with their real size, while the friendliness—I almost tremble upon the word " loving-kindness "—of the people draws the whole stretch of wild country together like one family.

After this lofty panegyric it will sound ridiculous for me to claim Highland birth. I hasten to say, however, that I have alas ! long since been anglicized and have not the impertinence to claim any of these high qualities. I merely add this statement because the realization of that fact was a large element in my pleasure at that moment. With this " pride of birth " there was mingled the happiest recollections of my childhood. Those long summer holidays, which are the one compensation for the unfortunate Scottish schoolboy, were for me always spent in the

* I use the French word here, as the English would lend itself to a ridiculous double meaning.

Highlands. In those great cleansing hills and valleys the unhappiness of my schooldays always used to drop from me like a bad dream, and " next term " would seem infinitely far off. The long days of completely happy loneliness spent in fishing a mountain burn up to its source, or wandering by the shores of a loch which, to my infant fancy, seemed as big as a sea, still give me a twinge of uneasiness when I am in a pub in the Strand, and, for a moment, I wonder whether I am spending my life in quite the happiest way possible. The sight of a few sea trout lying in a fishmonger's window in Bond Street can arrest my progress through that fashionable thoroughfare almost long enough to " cause an obstruction "—I have never heard before of anyone being made homesick by fish—and any profound silence in a cathedral, or great building, can set my mind wandering to that audible silence of the glens ; and I see in an uneasy fancy those myriad tinted hills, those valleys with the shrill green grass and highly-coloured flowers of the North, the great long curves and sweepings of the mountain flanks ; " the quiet eyes " and " plain faces," and the passionately reserved or open manners of their inhabitants ; the loneliness, the intimacy the sense of space, of distance, of enchantment ; the rowan berries, the mountain streams, and the red deer.

While I had been standing looking at this prospect and thinking these thoughts, the sun had begun to rise in real earnest and was busy at his accustomed task of " gilding pale streams " ; the last wraiths of mist had withdrawn from the mountains, and I saw what a straight and formidable barrier they were between the North and the South. Where I was now standing the Romans had halted in their Northward march and been appalled by what lay before them. They could not face the Highland line, and sent an embassy to make peace with the Scots at Fortingall, the little village in the mountains where it is said that Pontius Pilate was born—a legend less absurd than it at first appears when one considers that

Pontius Pilate's father was an officer in one of the Northern expeditions in Britain. In the uncertain light of the dawn the line looked blacker and more abrupt than it really is ; and as I walked on my way through the village of Doune towards Callander and the Pass of Leny, it seemed that I should, when I arrived at the foot of the Pass, be able to take one step from the Lowlands into the Highlands.

I reached Callander at about midday—an indeterminate little town. Really Lowland and respectable, but somewhat alarmed by the great hills which hang over it, it compromises with the North ; and its grey stone-built little High Street does not offend. After some bread and cheese for lunch, I took the road into the Pass of Leny and was soon in the heart of the hills walking beside the shores of the narrow and deep Loch Lubnaig, into the iron-grey waters of which the mountains drop as abruptly as if they were man-built walls.

This was a country I knew well, for I had as a boy often fished in Loch Lubnaig and in the streams which feed it. I was, therefore, all the more disgusted to see what had happened to the place in the one decade since I had last been there. In the old days when one left Callander the romantic desolation that descended on one was as quick and as definite as the change in the scenery. On the far side of the Loch there ran the Highland railway on which twice a day funny little trains used to puff slowly along. They no more disturbed the scene than did those other links with urban life—the telegraph wires. They were merely insignificant and ridiculously out of place. Now, however, another and more powerful terror had invaded the valley—the omnipotent and omnipresent motor-car. I admit the day was a general holiday in the district and in Glasgow, but that was no consolation for my disgust.

They manage this sort of thing so much better in the South. The irresistible march of democracy, or rather of the slaves of plutocracy amused with the playthings which their masters give them, is nowadays past

complaining at. No one with any sense of the present can mind the invasion of what the *Daily Express* calls the " beauty spots " by the town-stifled crowds. It is not the fault of the beauty spots, nor of the crowds : it is just the fault of their existence. Aristocracy being now finished, done with, over for ever, the ideal—though in a few isolated instances not the fact—of the " gentleman " now being quite dead and unsought after, those things that were kept by and for the " gentlemen " must go down the drain, along with their creators. This invasion of the countryside by the spawn of industrialism can be amusing, or just dreary and horrible. In the South of England they have succeeded in making it fairly amusing. For fifty miles around London the country is like the Netherlands of Europe—a thickly populated garden. The villages lie so close and are so intimate that the car or char-à-bancs passes almost insensibly from one to the other. Now on Saturdays and Bank Holidays, when the 'buses and cheap cars go pouring out of London, it is not so much an invasion by the Cockneys of an unprepared and hitherto inviolate countryside, but a kind of weekly swelling of the great city, an expansion into the surrounding parks and pleasure-grounds, which is nowadays all that Surrey, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Middlesex have become. The people who come on these outings do not offend against the country—or no one but a snob would think that they do. The singing, the changing of hats, the mouth-organ recitals, all these are part of the Southern English landscapes just as much as the students who tour the romantic parts of Germany and sing the *Studenten Lieder* together are part of their own country.

I have been fortunate enough to go on several Saturday outings with Cockneys, but I think the most enjoyable one was when the proprietor of a little Covent Garden café was kind enough to ask me to come out on a char-à-banc outing which he had organized for his customers. We all met at eleven o'clock in the morning : the men in

neat blue serge suits, brown shoes, and flannel shirts open at the neck. The women were in cheap gay summer frocks. We had our photograph taken along with the char-à-bancs outside the café, and all stood stiffly in attitudes of assumed ease. The getting into the char-à-bancs was, of course, the occasion of a great deal of banter : who was to sit next to whom was the great question and the great joke. If one found oneself next to someone else's wife, the proceeding was to say something like : " Oh, Mrs. Plumtree, aren't we lucky ? " and then to shout over to the head of the Plumtree family : " Here you are, Mr. Plumtree. I'm all along o' your missis. Jest you wait till the 'bus stops and I get her in the long grass ! " Whereupon she would cry out with a Cockney cackle : " 'Ark at 'im ! Ain't 'e wicked ! " The 'bus would start suddenly and everyone would be precipitated into their seats or their neighbours' laps, and the great shining monster would wind its way out of the London streets into the country.

At the objective, some seaside town, the party broke up for an hour or two. But the cream of the day came on the drive back. The 'bus stopped at at least six pubs on the way back (the driver always refusing drinks), the company would flock into some minute bar-parlour, where songs, the playing of cracked pianos, the spanking of fat women and the concealment of other people's hats were the accompaniment to the serious business of drinking. The publican and his wife always joined in the fun : for you will find that most country pubs within fifty miles of London are kept by ex-Cockneys—cab-drivers, 'bus-conductors, small shopkeepers and the like, who have saved up enough to buy a country pub, where they plan to end up their days. At last it was decided that there must be no more pubs—or possibly the pubs decided that there must be no more of us—and the monster chariot headed straight for London and Covent Garden. It was amusing to take a seat right at the back of the 'bus and, after having religiously gone through the ceremony

of changing hats with the lady on one's right, watch the row upon row in front of one of fat necks and fluffy hair swaying and bobbing with the motion of the machine. The noise of the engine was completely drowned by the long, drawling, unmusical but amusing yells of song which it is the practice of returning revellers in England to make. The country-folk who were on the roads as we went past (heralding our progress with our terrific noise) would laugh and make friendly gestures. When we passed other chars-à-bancs containing the same kind of cargo, the excitement was tremendous, and the drivers of the two machines had to come to an agreement to go by different ways or there would have certainly been an accident. Sometimes we would pass a church outing of a mothers' meeting, with the curate in the front seat standing up and with embarrassed gestures trying to stop the uproar with which we had infected them. As we swept past, the invariable greeting shouted from our forty throats was : " Nah then, Archdeacon, can't you keep the 'arem quiet ? " In justice to the Church, sometimes the curate's voice was the loudest and most uproarious of the whole crowd.

As the evening fell, and we bumped and banged into London, the forty throats began to get a little worn out, the prettier female heads began to sink on to the younger male shoulders, and the melodion, or mouth-organ, was all the music that accompanied our procession. When we reached Covent Garden and disbanded, it did not seem to those of us who had the taste for reflection that we had been out of London at all ; we merely seemed to have been enjoying ourselves in a garden belonging to London —an extension of Hyde Park. It would be possible— and, from the advertisement point of view for the 'bus companies, profitable—to produce sentimental reflections on the coaching spirit with which the South of England is still alive, and to say that these boisterous outings are—to use an alarming word—Dickensian. I am not quite bold enough, nor " olde Englysshe " enough for that ;

but I do most emphatically state that though these char-à-bancs outings are dusty, noisy, vulgar, and many other things, they are not at basis in conflict with the genius of Southern England.

It is just the same with the private outings in cheap little cars by the lesser and therefore more prosperous and amusing bourgeoisie. I know a butler : an extremely pompous butler, for he works in one of those huge new blocks of luxury flats, and the people who inhabit them are much more fond of pomposity in butlers than are the class who keep them in their private houses. This butler manages to get back to his home (a small flat in Battersea), where he lives with his sister and her grown-up son and daughter, for most week-ends. And in the summer months, on the Sundays, he nearly always drives them out into the country in his cheap little car, which he has bought by some ingenious instalment system. I have been honoured by having been asked to accompany the family on one or two of these outings, and they have been some of the most unembarrassed (uninhibited, if you prefer that word), experiences that I have ever enjoyed. The butler, free from butling, has unbent so vigorously and so far that he has almost bent back again the other way. Though his gestures are slow and have a stiffness which has obviously been acquired in some restraining pursuit, the meaning and intention of those gestures is careless and ridiculous. His sister and nephew and niece have the vitality and the easy manners of their class, so that the whole day seems like a journey amongst an infinite number of friends. In every pub at which the party stops, the niece plays the piano and the butler chats with the landlord. Sometimes the landlord suggests that we all should go into the back parlour ; here the butler, influenced by the geniality of the day and beer he has drunk, can sometimes be persuaded to wrap himself up in the parlour lace curtains and give his famous imitation of Pavlova in " The Dying Swan "—a performance which, it seems, made a great impression on

him when he was a younger man—and not one of his family is in the least ashamed of this undignified lapse. The atmosphere of the day is the exact opposite of that which is produced by an upper middle-class family in slightly reduced circumstances going away to the seaside for their holidays. Most of us have seen (some endured) this dreadful thing : the harassed and embarrassed father, the irritable mother, the fuss and confusion at the station, the row with the cabman, the feeling in the third-class carriage, into which the family is packed along with three or four other people, that everyone else is laughing at them ; the agony endured by the adolescent heir in the fear that the father will not tip enough and so bring about a scene with the sweating and rude porter ; the vomiting of the youngest girl in the carriage, the snubbing of the woman who tries to be helpful by the mother, who is overcome with shame ; the frigidity of the landlady of the uncomfortable lodgings at the destination, and the homesickness for the little house in Suburbia experienced by everyone on the first evening.* This catalogue of miseries is, on the principle of describing a thing by its opposites, intended to give something of the spirit of a Sunday's outing with my butler friend.

All this lengthy digression is merely to point my statement that though they do this sort of thing well in the South of England, in Scotland, and, above all, in the Southern Highlands, they fail most lamentably. To begin with, no one looks particularly happy ; no one sings or shouts, or, with a flushed face leans over the edge of the chars-à-bancs and cars to shout personal remarks at other people in other cars. The road is just a procession of well-behaved vulgar people in cars that are neither expensive nor cheap. Secondly, even if they did sing and shout and look happy, their presence—though possibly less depressing—would be quite as offensive to their surroundings, hopelessly out of key. If there is

* These remarks, I hasten to explain, for the sake of my family, are the fruits of observation, not of experience!

one quality which all have agreed to grant the Highlander, it is dignity. Even his detractors have mentioned it : sometimes in ridicule, contrasting the Highland dignity with the Highland poverty, and claiming it to be absurd. Now if there is one quality which, if one may extravagantly generalize, is less and less of account nowadays less and less seen, it is dignity. This is not a stupid jeer at the new age. I can understand that (though I cannot conceive how) this quality will be replaced by a better one, something less ponderous, less obstructive. In the meantime it is a little hard while the change is going on. This dignity of the Highlander is essentially a part of the scenery of his country. Whether it has produced this quality in him, I shall not be so bold as to say, but it is certainly there in his surroundings, and only dignified people can in decency appear in them.

The valley in which Loch Lubnaig lies is a beautiful one, much more beautiful than most Perthshire scenery, which I consider to be inferior to the rest of the Highlands. It lies just north of the border-line between the plains and the mountains. It was, on that account, a valley of surprise, of delightful associations for one approaching the North by the Pass of Leny. It is therefore all the more painful to see it in the hands of an undignified Glasgow democracy. No, I am not being snobbish. None more than myself resents any stupid jeers at the Glasgow democracy : certainly none more than myself would welcome that the Loch Lubnaig valley and all its neighbouring glens should be inhabited by poor, simple people ; but these people should be the right ones—those who by right of ancestry and demeanour are as much of these hills as the red deer and the grouse which the Englishmen come up to shoot at. As I walked miserably along the road, nearly jostled into the Loch and blinded by the dust and fumes, I wondered whether, since the crofters and other poor Highlanders had been expelled from the land, it were not better that it should lie, at least in appearance unspoilt, in the hands of those few who had

stolen it than ruined by the many who are now rapidly succeeding them.

This was, perhaps, an extravagantly gloomy view ; for the traffic pressure was a little relieved at the road which branches off to the Trossachs. But it made me swear to myself that nothing would make me visit the Trossachs now. I had never seen them. They were gone now for ever. I preferred to let them exist in imagination than to realize them despoiled and made disgusting. I was also slightly, but only slightly, cheered by the thought that after all the Pass of Leny is now looked upon as practically the only entrance to the Highlands, and that all traffic passing North was probably congested into this narrow neck.

V

By Strathyre I met a man whom I at first took to be a tramp, but who turned out to be in search of work. He was making his way North to Fort Augustus, where they are building a new road and where he hoped to find employment. He asked me whether he would be able to put up at Lochearnhead—by " put up," he, of course, meant find free lodgings for a bit of work. I told him that I hadn't the faintest idea, but that I was making for the Braes of Balquhidder, where I hoped to get free lodging, for many there have my name, and that if he joined forces with me he might be lucky. Balquhidder lay only a little out of his way and so he readily agreed to my plan. We crossed the River Balvaig at Strathyre Bridge and took General Wade's road along the hillside. General Wade was the pacifying agent after Butcher Cumberland's massacres in the Highlands in the aftermath of the " '45." He was the first Englishman to adopt kindly tactics with the " savages of the hills," and one of his most beneficial acts was the building of roads through hitherto almost impassable valleys. You may still sometimes see his road running—a green and simple

thing—by the side of the new tarmac steel-grey ribands. They cross, re-cross, separate, and return to each other ; and it is a fantastic thing when walking along the new roads suddenly to come across this faint ghost and, with a feeling of relief for one's hot, tired feet, leave the reality for the past.

My companion was an Englishman, and as we walked along under the slopes of Bein-an-Shithein, a very gracious " protuberance," to use Johnson's word, it amused me to hear his views on the Scots and the various peoples he had encountered on his journey North. He had, so he told me, managed to get lifts most of the way and I don't think he really had received much impression from his experiences. Thinking that I was English, because of my voice—and in spite of my name—he launched out into an abuse of the Scots for not having more villages on the road in which he could work. He grumbled at their rudeness, but inconsequentially added that he had often been kindly treated. " Pretty scenery all this," he said after a bit, nodding his head at the coloured mountains all around him, and with that dismissed his circumstances from his mind save occasionally, I think, to express a fear of the more desolate part which we were now coming to (for we had long ago left the motors) not being able to provide him with much work. Was there a pub at this 'ere Bal—— what's its name, that we were coming to ? I said there was not. " That's funny," replied my companion. " These 'ere Scotties don't 'arf like a bit when they can get it." I said that that was why there was no pub at Balquhidder : a line of reasoning which he could not follow. He then tried to get out of me what my business was up here. As I had all my money concealed somewhere on me in the various pockets of my shirt and coat : also, as I reflected that I might have to spend a night in this man's company, I told him that I was desperately out of work, but had a chance of doing some at my brother's farm at Ballachulish, on the West coast. I said that I should have to press

forward to get there soon, for I had no money and my brother would not give me any till I had worked.

By this time we had reached the corner of the glen and were turning into that most beautiful vale of Balquhidder. I felt that in spite of himself my companion was charmed by the scene. The hills on either side here sweep down in an uninterrupted slope to a rich green valley, through which there runs a slow stream. The crops grow profusely here. The farms are prosperous, the farm-houses are neat white little buildings in the eighteenth-century manner ; the district is one of those mysterious places in the Highlands that have a power of catching all the sun that is to be had, even when for miles around there is nothing but mist and rain, and the result is that it looks as if it were a bit of domestic Southern England transplanted into a Highland glen. These slopes and fields have always been a happy resting-place for Highlanders who were either not ambitious enough to be warlike, or who were compelled by the forces of law and order to lead a temporarily quiet existence. There has lived here for centuries the somewhat insignificant but certainly peaceable clan from which I take my name. And Rob Roy MacGregor, the outlaw, the Robin Hood of Scotland, withdrew to this happy valley to end his days. He is buried in the little English-looking churchyard in a noble tomb amidst a host of prim little McLaren graves. There stands still, at the door of one of the few cottages in the village, a rough-hewn stone chair which was his, beside it another stone with a deep notch in it to hold his sword, and two things that are more like boulders than stones with which he used to "putt the weight." In his old age he used very much to domineer over my simple ancestors, who were a sept of the Stewarts and so none too friendly with the MacGregor Campbell faction. After his death, however, they took it out of the other MacGregors who remained on in Balquhidder, and on Sundays would not allow them to come into the church until the most insignificant McLaren was seated.

Rob Roy is now no more than a romantic legend, and there are only a very, very few McLarens and MacGregors left. The Braes of Balquhidder was one of those districts which suffered so terribly under the landlordism of the nineteenth century, and the emigration ships to Canada almost swept this valley clean of inhabitants. The crofters, the smallholders, had to go, and only the larger farmers could afford to stand out against the terror.

The declining sun made this place lovely to look at. The delicious smells of a Highland evening—the peat smoke, the pine woods, the sun-warmed heather—floated out across the plain to meet us ; and the quiet domesticity of the scene fell like a benediction on the tired mind. It was, indeed, the setting for a homecoming. My companion's foolish chatter began to annoy me, but I reflected with some amusement that if my hospitality—for I had brought this on myself—were to break down now in this of all places, I should have very little respect left for my " sense of the past."

We walked on through the tiny remains of the village and knocked at the door of one of the white-painted farmhouses. The farmer was of my name. He received us with perfect courtesy, and gave us each a huge tumbler of creamy milk and some oat-cake and honey. When I asked if we could sleep anywhere on his farm, he at once offered us a bedroom in the house. Two things made me refuse this. Firstly, I did not want to take advantage of my namesake's kindness to impose upon him the dirty and unpleasant creature with whom I had saddled myself, for I felt none too sure of his honesty. Secondly (and purely selfishly), my stomach turned at the prospect of sharing a bed with him. So we were shown out to an out-house, a kind of barn, in which there were masses of deep, soft straw and heather.

As soon as we were left alone to make our beds, my companion turned on me angrily for refusing the bedroom. Though I was disgusted that he should complain at all,

since it was owing to my help that he had had a meal and free lodgings of any kind, I found it difficult to explain why I had refused the bedroom. I remained angrily silent for a long time while I busied myself with arranging the place where I was to sleep, but as he kept on querulously asking me, I thought it best to appeal to his lower nature. I told him that these Scottish farmers were devils for work and that if we had slept in the house we should have been locked in, and made to do some job before we went on. As it was, we should be able to get out early in the morning before anyone was astir. As I suspected he did not believe this ridiculous story and kept on complaining, finally adding, in the tone of one who had missed a good thing : " We might 'ave picked up lots of things in the 'ouse if we'd 'ad the time. There weren't 'arf some good things in the 'all." I was so tired and irritated at this stupid boast, which was just meant to annoy me—for I now thought that he had not the pluck to be a thief—that I answered him with the truth.

" If you want to know why I didn't take the bedroom, I'll tell you. It was because, though I have done many disgusting things in my life, I could never do anything so filthy as to sleep in the same bed as a lousy, greasy—— like you. And it was only because I didn't want to look proud that I came out into this barn with you and didn't persuade the farmer to let me stay in the bed alone."

" All right, matey, there ain't no call to lose your 'air over this, my pretty boy," was his not unpleasant reply to my rude outburst.

And so, after a little more conversation, we made up our couches and fell asleep. I was careful to use my rucksack for my pillow and not to let my coat leave my back.

We awoke early at about five o'clock. My companion asked me if he could get up to Fort Augustus through Ballachulish. I was foolish enough to tell him that though it would take him some distance out of his way, he could do it by walking up the banks of the Caledonian

Canal. I at once saw my mistake when he, without consulting my wishes, said he would accompany me as far as Ballachulish. I saw that he looked upon me as a useful companion in this country, and I began to suspect that he thought I had money. As I was washing in the little stream which ran by the farm, I put some paper money into my handkerchief so that when I returned I might have a chance of testing him. When I got back to the stone on which he was sitting waiting for me, I pulled out my handkerchief to wipe my face and let fall, in the most obvious way, the money I had concealed in it. He turned away at once so as to pretend that he had not seen it, but when I looked at him again, I saw a sly satisfaction in his face. I was now quite sure that he intended to rob me. I began to encourage him in this design. I told him that we had a long and desolate way to go across the mountains, that we would not reach the next house till the evening, that I was a bad hill-climber and would need his help. To all these remarks he replied with a foolishly happy leer that he didn't mind a bit of a climb, oh no, not he. He was one of the worst dissemblers I have ever met. I had quite a simple plan for eluding him when we were on the hills ; but before I led him there I thought I would explain to him his direct route, so that when I left him he would be able to find his way. The direction which I intended to take lay over the mountains at the end of the Loch Voil Glen and down into Crianlarich and the Moor of Rannoch. Before I took to the heather, I turned to him and said :

" There is a long walk before us. If you want to get quickly to Fort Augustus, what you must do is to go back along this road till you strike the main road and then keep due North. However, if you want to come this way, I warn you it's a stiff climb and you'll get bloody little out of me." I added this insulting sentence to see how he would take it.

He just laughed openly in my face and said he would " bloody well risk it." He knew that we were too near to

houses for him to attack me then and there, but the mask was very nearly off.

" Right you are ! " I said, and took to the heather. I am not a brave man. I loathe fighting except when I am really angry. Indeed, I am in some ways almost a physical coward. In this instance, I knew I held the whip hand. It was not that I was stronger than my companion—we were about equally matched. It was simply that I knew when once we were on the hill I could make rings round him. I could see from the way he walked, from the way he looked at the mountains on either side of him, that he had never seen anything like this before—indeed, he had told me so earlier—much less ever tried to climb them. Now one of my few physical feats is that of climbing. Though I say it myself, I can go up a hillside like a cat. I am small, compactly built, and have strong leg muscles. I can stoop easily for a long time without getting tired. So I am able, on even a not very steep slope, to use my hands as well as my feet, and can scramble up at a great speed.

When we left the road to take a Northward pointing glen, I started off at a heavy pace, at the same time climbing up the left-hand slope. After about a quarter of an hour I turned round and waited for my companion and pursuer. He was sweating and gasping.

" 'Ere, what the 'ell are you going at that bloody rate for ? " he asked me, when he got within about twenty yards of me. He had not shouted at me to stop earlier—I think for fear he should startle me into going faster. When I stopped and waited for him, his suspicions were allayed and he felt he could rebuke me without alarming me.

" All right, matey," I replied, " It's only for you I'm doing it. I want to get over the top of this hill so that we can get to a nice private place where you can rob me." With these words I turned sharp left and made straight up the hillside as fast as I could go. I crouched near the ground and used every projection of rock or heather

to help me swing my way up with my hands. After a minute I turned round and shouted down to him : " Come on, Bill. I've got a hundred quid here : it's yours for the asking."

When I had done another quarter of an hour's climb, " Bill " was nearly two hundred yards below me and was about to give up the chase. To encourage him I sat down, for I was a bit puffed myself, and waited for him to climb up. He was a pitiful sight when he came near enough to me for me to see. His face was blotchy—not shiny—and his breath whistled. When he came to what he thought was within range, he threw a stone. It fell miserably short. It showed me that he was blood angry, so I started off again. When I next looked round, he was standing still and had given up. I was not finished with him. I had an ingenious plan for luring him on to one more rush. I pretended to slip off a rock and sprain my ankle. I squealed aloud for help ; and he leapt forward like a dog when it hears a rabbit in a gin. This time, when he got near enough, it was I who threw the stone, which came a good deal nearer to hitting him than I had intended. It made him pause. · While he did so, I jumped up and with a vulgar noise went on with my scramble. This took the last drop of hope out of him and he turned to go down the hill. I sat down and, remembering how in the clear mountain air sound can carry, shouted oaths and curses at him. I used every foul and meaningless word I have heard in the gutter. I went into his family history and described his probable future with loving details until I saw that even in this air he was beyond earshot.

I had been so preoccupied in my manœuvres that I had not noticed the height which I had gained. But now, as I lay back in the heather, exhausted by my exertions and my anger, I had time to see where I had come to. The sun was now high and the day quite faultless. I could see far down the beautiful long glen which we had ascended. The deep blue narrow lochs lay shimmering in

the heat : the farms and fields were as minute as the smallest toys ; the heather, odorous in the warmth of the sun, contained a million foraging bees whose murmur seemed to fill the whole valley ; and far below, no larger than a toiling ant, my late companion was regaining the road.

It takes a long time to learn the platitudes of life, much longer than the paradoxes and epigrams. I do not know that I shall ever be able to teach myself that revenge is the most disappointing thing in the world, though that fact has been drummed into me on a hundred occasions. Now as I saw the tiny movements of the man whom I had just been insulting, and who had had designs to steal my money from me, he looked just pathetic to me. I felt the whole thing was such a pity, and came near to tears as he disappeared slowly to the east.

I got up wearily, and, keeping my level on the hillside, turned Northwards up the tributary glen which had been my objective all along. Around me great peaks showed themselves grouped in a forbidding way in front of my path. When I had toiled along the glen and had passed under the slopes of the first peak, I thought I would sit down and rest and eat two of the apples which I had in my pocket. After I had done so, and washed my face in a burn, I lay back in the heather and wondered whether I would ever be able to get to Crianlarich, which I knew to be vaguely somewhere the other side of those mountains in front. I wondered so long that the heat of the midday sun and the sound of the heather bees soon began to influence my mind, which was only now recovering from the nervous anger I had enjoyed. Like a drug, the sounds and scents overcame me and for an hour or so I was lost in a waking slumber, in which I was all the time half conscious of the great mountains around me and the chatter of the streams that tumbled down their sunny slopes.

When I came to full consciousness I cursed myself for my laziness. The sun had moved a long way in the sky,

and I could tell by my burning face that I must have slept some time. I consoled myself with the recollection of how early I had started on my journey that day, and then continued Northwards. It was a weary journey. There were several very tricky bogs which I had to negotiate ; the lack of trees made me to be exposed to the heat nearly all the time ; and with the uneven ground I was perpetually climbing and descending in a very irritating way. I had lost my stick during the flight from " Bill," and so was continually stumbling without any support. Once, a keeper shouted angrily at me and tried to come after me, for one is not very popular on the moors in the middle of June. But he was lazy in the heat of the day and did not persevere. On one of the great peaks to the north-east of me, which I took to be Ben More, there was actually some snow still lying. I looked at it with longing for the coolness which it meant, and kept on my sweating and disagreeable way. The scenery, though impressive, was less pleasant than that which I had been enjoying earlier in the day. There was a bleakness, a kind of brown desolation in the great sweeps and folds of the hills, which it would have been very nice to look at from a distance and at leisure, but which oppressed me with a sense that I was struggling against infinite disadvantages.

When I had crossed the watershed, I could see the little moorland town of Crianlarich below me, and stretching away into the distance beyond it that waste of heather and water which, though it is not actually the Moor of Rannoch, anticipates it by its openness and barrenness. Let me say at once that the effect of this place on me was not at all like the effect produced by the drab Lowland plain round Linlithgow. If I was depressed by this prospect now before me, I was depressed in the grand manner. I was made to feel my own insignificance. I was overweighted, overheated, overtired. The sight of these vast " protuberances "—I cannot resist that Johnsonian word—and these apparently limitless plains was just a feverish addition to my state of mind.

I reached Crianlarich before six o'clock and bought myself some eggs and a pint of milk. In one of the hollows behind a shed belonging to the little station I boiled the eggs in a saucepan lent me by a cottager, and washed them down with long draughts of the milk. I was so much refreshed by this that I foolishly decided to press on to Tyndrum the same evening. Ever since Strathyre I had now been bearing westwards. This was partly due to an unplanned instinct (for the West, when I am walking, always has a fascination for me), and partly to a desire to escape from the Perthshire and East Highlands. The East Highlands are in my opinion very inferior to the West. Their scenery may be more impressive—they are more wooded, and their rivers longer and deeper, containing better salmon—but they lack the remote mysteriousness of the Western hills, which the invasion of the Atlantic to their valleys and the Celtic blood of their inhabitants has given them. To the Eastern Highlands, I am thankful to say, flock nearly all the holiday-makers. Most of the motor-cars which had so angered me in the Pass of Leny, if they passed the Trossachs, were going to branch off eastwards by Killin ; and in the Eastern Highlands lies the Gleneagles Hotel. I can say no more ! except, perhaps, to mention that Queen Victoria settled in the Cairngorms.

Tyndrum lies at the head of a glen which leads out on to the Moor of Rannoch ; but even at Tyndrum there is such an air of desolation in the steep treeless mountains, and the long curves of the apparently endless valleys, that one may look upon it, and not the Bridge of Orchy, as the gateway to that celebrated but little explored desert of peat and water.

I was then anxious to reach Tyndrum this evening so that I might have the whole of the next day for the moor. My eagerness, however, was my undoing, for I arrived at Tyndrum late in the evening, not only painfully tired, but with the tendon of my right heel strained and swollen. I found a comfortable little white house, where I was given

a bed for the night at an absurdly small price. I had a hot rum-and-milk, turned into bed, and slept till the sun was high overhead the next day and the moor shimmering beneath the prospect of a summer day, long as it can be only in the North. My heel was still, I thought, in need of rest, so I lay up for the remainder of the day and read a volume of Swift.

VI

On the next day I had to resist a strong inclination to walk north-westwards to Glencoe by the road which traverses the west side of the Rannoch Moor. It would have been easy walking—there would have been no motors, and the scenery splendid—but I had seen Glencoe often before, I should have attained the west coast at Ballachulish too soon, and, besides, I had promised myself that I would really cross Rannoch and not merely skirt it.

I therefore made use of the road as long as it kept by the railway that is in the glen leading down to Bridge of Orchy. I then deserted it and turned straight Northwards across what looked like a limitless waste of peat and water. My original and foolish intention had been to hold due north and carry on until I reached Rannoch, or saw some house or cottage where I could beg for shelter. I was fortunate enough to be dissuaded from this right at the start by the impossibly boggy ground which I encountered the moment I left the road. I therefore climbed on to the tiny railway embankment and, telling myself that this followed the same course as that which I had proposed to myself, began that dreary business known as "counting the sleepers."

This exercise, which consists of walking along the middle of the railway track and stepping from sleeper to sleeper, is at first very irritating, for no disposition of sleepers ever falls exactly evenly with the length of one's steps. After about a mile or so one gradually begins to

alter the natural length of it unconsciously so that it fits the spaces and, if the line has been well laid out and the sleepers do not vary, one swings along with a very easy and regular motion. The eyes are fixed on the track, one hardly notices anything to the right or left of it, and the curves are so gentle as to be unappreciable by the walking traveller. There then begins that half hypnotic effect which is produced by sleeper counting, and which all who have tramped for any length of time on a railway track have experienced. If one is bored, if one's object is simply to "get there," this drowsiness is pleasant. It can, however, be dangerous if one gets so absorbed as not to notice a train approaching from behind.

The Highland Railway is, I think (for I am quite ignorant of technical matters about gauges), a little narrower than most railways in the United Kingdom. Certainly its sleepers lie a little closer, so it took me some time to get accustomed to the spacing. Moreover, I was continually looking round, stopping, and otherwise distracting my attention from the track in front of me, and was far into the moor before I got anything of a swing into my walk. Even when I did, and was sufficiently bored and tired, I no more lost consciousness of the moor than a meditating fare on a London 'bus forgets the confusion of the streets through which he travels. It was always beating into my brain, and had so far influenced me that when I stood still and shut my eyes, I could feel that I was standing in an immense space. I could put out my hand and touch the nothingness that pressed in on me.

The Highland Railway, as I have said before, does not rob anything of the grandeur from the scenery through which it passes. It is so insignificant, its trains pass so seldom and so slowly, it no more takes away the desolation from the Highlands for the traveller than does the sight of an Atlantic liner minimize for the swimmer the vastness of the ocean. Roads can much more effectually destroy this quality. The constant stream of different kinds of travellers is continually and regularly interrupting the

mind, and is somehow more potent, less laughable than the fussy little train that once every six hours or so snorts its way along the grim track.

On the Moor of Rannoch, even more than in the great mountains, is this harmlessness of the railway noticeable ; indeed, it seems in this place to help the really appalling effect of waste around one. The track is a little higher than the land, and if one is walking on it one gets just a slightly longer view over the hillocks and tarns which besprinkle the way. Here and there the track will be banked up and roofed over with corrugated iron so as to prevent, in winter, the drifting snow from holding up the trains ; one plunges into these quasi-tunnels almost with relief to escape from the monotony of the scene ; and when one emerges at the other end, sometimes a flock of red deer will be startled by this sudden appearance, to skim away like the shadow of a cloud across the ground.

I had struck for my attempt on the moor a really hot Northern day. There was practically no shade. To right and left the stretches of water and heather shimmered like gauze, and out of a sky of pale Scottish blue there beat down a sun which seemed to hold no promise of ever declining. It is this that makes the occasional hot day in the North so difficult for the traveller. The sun is as intolerable at six o'clock in the evening as at midday, and even at nine it can make itself uncomfortably felt.

I had no idea of the time—for I have never yet been able to keep a watch of any value for long, and it is not worth while buying cheap ones—and the state of the day could tell me nothing. All I knew was that I had been walking an infernally long time, and the line of mountains which I took to mark the end of the moor seemed hardly to have got any nearer to me—with so great distances was I now engaged.

I descended from the track on to the shady side and began to eat the fruit and oat-cakes which I had brought with me from Tyndrum. As usual the heat, the tiredness,

the smell of the heather, and the comfortable sense of food inside me, bowled me right over and I sank off into a delicious sleep. As I declined towards this happy state, it occurred to me that this might be a suitable place in which to die. I might lie here for weeks, months, and no one ever discover me, while the daily trains puffed and rattled within a few yards of me. Already half oblivious of my immense surroundings, the prospect of becoming entirely so, and for ever, frightened me less than it usually does. I apologize for mentioning this experience, which I admit is not an uncommon one, especially to-day. But since I am so egotistical I cannot help talking about it, for it is *for me* an extremely uncommon experience.

I have, and I am proud to admit it, a reasonable and instinctive horror of Death. (I will give him a capital letter, for he has certainly earned it.) This dislike is rare nowadays ; on all sides you will hear young men, and old, saying that they do not fear Death. The time-worn argument about having nothing to fear in extinction as none will know that he is extinct, and its many thread-bare fellows, are produced to justify this claimed lack of fear ; but these arguments are no more than justifications, in most instances, for the real reason, which is a lack of interest in life. I admit, and willingly give away with both hands, that the finest thing in the world, the basis of all morality and true vigour, is to love life and despise Death, knowing that you have in you the means for the conquering of that bully. This true, this now saintly, though in the age of Faith common, quality of hope I salute from afar off. It is my most constant prayer, my most optimistic belief, that if I am for the remainder of my life supplicantly faithful, I shall in my last agony gain a glimpse of this conquering hope. I know that I cannot, except in stray moments, expect this hope before then, for I have other consolations, other impetus, to urge me. That I may die knowing at last what many others more simple, more wise, more weak, more strong, have with the utmost certainty awaited, is all I can ask for. In the

meantime, though frightened, appalled, by this Prince of all cads, all I can do is to despise and become angry with those whose feeble vitality, or whose lack of imagination, has made them already crumple up before his ill-mannered threatening gestures.

To the child, Death is so far away as to be almost outside calculation ; but as he grows older, Death not only approaches nearer in measured time, but time itself becomes less and less measurable ; each succeeding week seems shorter than the last, and the result is that in this gaining motion, this arithmetical progression towards the grave, Death suddenly looms up to the sensitive and imaginative youth unexpectedly ; its visible, sensible presence enfolds him before he has had time to prepare for it. To-day most young men do not seem to mind this, they either look upon its approach with indifference because they are also indifferent to life—this I despise and do not envy ; or else they merely lack the imagination to conceive of Death touching them, and this, I confess, I envy, but despise. To lack the imagination to conceive of Death must surely be to lack the imagination to enjoy so many pleasures which make life worth the pain. There are, I think, a few quite reasonable people who without having conquered the bully by the vigour of their faith have a quite easy certainty that they cannot end with Death. They are not so enviable as the saintly ones who have conquered. Their good fortune seems to me to rest on some psychological chance. They are not so feeble as to welcome Death, nor are they so stupid as to neglect it. They possess some lucky way of thinking, quite independent of religious belief, which enables them to pass over such Death-convincing experiences as going under chloroform—to take one of a thousand uneasy incidents in life—and to be quite sure that they cannot be obliterated. Their good fortune does not seem to me to rest upon a sure basis; some accident may rob them of it as easily as they have acquired it. None of them that I have met backs up this extraordinary gift by a passionate

belief or a closely reasoned system. They may be passionate in other ways, or reasonable on other points ; but on this question they merely look at you with a wide-eyed surprise when you admit to your own fears. " But you are a Catholic, my dear fellow," they will say to you. " You seem to follow the precepts and misfortunes of your religion with tolerable, if not over-strict attention. How can you so doubt its most essential dogma ? "

There is no arguing with them. In one way your own position is, at first glance, the absurd one. To worship the Son of God in the Sacrifice of the Mass and then in the very act of leaving the church to avert your eyes from the memorials on the Church walls in an uneasy desire to avoid even the reminder of Death, as I have often done, is surely the sign of a very unstable mind. And yet, can they not see that just because the doctrine of the immortality of the Soul is the most essential of the Christian doctrines, is the most personal, bites nearest the bone, it is therefore the one that requires the greatest leap in the dark, the completest surrender to faith ?

I think also that there are others who, equally reasonable, sensitive, imaginative as these fortunate ones, have a bias on exactly the opposite side. Some psychological chance has given them an exaggerated dislike of Death, which is just as independent of faith or reason as is the certainty of the other people. For them there is the same possibility of change as for the certain ones. Their dislike, having no attackable foundation, may disappear easily and, to lapse again into the vulgar jargon, some release of an inhibition may give them relief, though not, of course, faith which is a quality of the Soul and is not dependent on psychological peculiarities.

It is amusing for me to try and detect this exaggerated fear in other people, to find by small signs other members of this odd freemasonry. One very reasonable and intelligent man I know tries to touch wood whenever Death is mentioned ; another, though not a Catholic, makes the sign of the Cross. He manages this by turning

away from his company on some pretext, and with a very small gesture crossing himself on about the third button of the waistcost. There are many other little oddnesses which give people away—even my egotism cannot induce me to reveal mine—but the most usual is just an elaborate and obviously strained effort to lead the conversation away from the subject of Death. Sometimes the subject is unavoidable ; it turns out to be the pivotal point of a philosophic discussion. It is then amusing to watch two people affected by this fear discussing the King of terrors. They are pathetically eager to produce arguments to each other for immortality.

" Take it from me, old chap," says the elder of the two, " I've been up against the problem a good many times in my life and I've been forced, mind you, forced to the conclusion that if you look at the thing clearly and without bias, there simply isn't a case for extinction after Death. Those people haven't a leg to stand on."

" Not a leg to stand on ! " echoes the younger man. " I absolutely agree with you." But you will notice behind all these brave assertions of certainty, an unspoken fear which now and then shows itself in their eyes and in the undue eagerness of their assent.

I am afraid this has been the most inconsequential digression that I have yet allowed myself in this book, but I was determined to get it in somewhere. For this Death business has a great deal of nonsense talked about it, and it is, as a matter of fact, quite true that before I fell asleep I didn't seem to mind Death very much, which was quite enough of a peg on which to hang this dissertation.

When I awoke, if I may return to the railway embankment on the Rannoch Moor, I found that I had slept for quite two hours and would have to walk hard if I were to attain even Rannoch station before midnight.

After I had shaken off the sluggishness of my sleep I soon got into the swing of the railway track walk and was absorbed into my monotonous way without much difficulty. I do not think I could have done the

remainder of my walk that day if I had not had the narcotic of that infinite number of parallel slabs of wood to numb my tiredness. A train passed me once, but that was the only thing that broke the loneliness and now slightly alarming dreariness of my march towards the unapproachable mountains.

After about two hours' walking the sun began at last to show signs of having had enough and, as it sank, the ring of hills at the edge of the vast plain which I had so rashly invaded began to change from blue to a more friendly pink. This illusion encouraged me a little, for it seemed to bring them nearer.

In another half-hour the whole stretch of wilderness around me was influenced by the setting sun, and even my tiredness was not proof against such beauty. My shadow cast from my high position on the embankment stretched longer and longer out across the plain and became more and more vague. Every projection of heather on rock took colour from the sunset and the innumerable tarns sank to a deeper and more frightening blue. I had decided that I must have slept longer than I had supposed, for the sun does not set in mid-June here until eleven o'clock.

I had almost made up my mind to sleep a night in the heather and was looking about for a rock which might shelter me from the dew, when I saw on a hill to the right of me some corrugated iron huts. As I made my way up to them I wondered if they were deserted, for I saw no sign of life in them and could conceive of no purpose for their being there.

I had opened the door of one of them and was almost in it when I saw two men watching me from a distance. I stopped embarrassed, for though I could hardly be taken for a burglar in this part of the world—and if I had walked out from Tyndrum to burgle these huts, I felt I deserved anything I got out of them—one does not even at the North Pole like to be found entering the most provincial Esquimau's hut. I closed the door and walked

towards them. I apologized and explained the position to them.

After the usual short pause for inspection of the stranger, they answered courteously enough that I could spend the night in one of the huts with them. They then went on to explain that they and several other men were living in these huts and working in the day at some water power electric works which they were laying on from one of the streams. I am afraid I am quite vague on all scientific matters and if I have got that wrong, I apologize. I know they weren't actually building a works there : they were digging about in some odd kind of way and laying down wires. It all looked quite inoffensive and probably very useful to some distant city. However, I could not have been more glad to see them if they had been building a cathedral. And I only understood how much I had disliked the idea of a night out when I enjoyed the relief of entering one of these huts along with my hosts. I offered one of them a pull at my whisky flask and, as he stopped drinking only with a painful effort, told him to finish it between him and his mate. "He's no for the whusky," said the drinker, meaning that he was teetotal, and finished off my remaining spirit at a gulp.

The influence of the whisky made him ask my pardon for his abruptness, and he offered as excuse the fact that as they so seldom got drink out at this place they lost their manners when they did taste it. As I made up an improvized heather couch in the corner of one of the huts, and then settled down to drink a tumbler of milk which one of the men gave me, I listened to the grumblings of my hosts. They were about half a dozen in all, for most of the work gang were away on some holiday. They were all Lowlanders and mostly skilled electricians from Glasgow. They admitted that they were getting paid well, but complained, with an eloquence uncommon in Lowlanders, of the loneliness of the place. They cursed the heather, the streams, the hills, the red deer ; and said that when they got back to Glasgow, if ever they heard a

song about the "Hielands" at the music-hall, they would throw a brick at the singer.

I asked them how they had got the milk, and they told me they were not far from Rannoch Station, where there was a cow. Indeed, I found Rannoch next day to be just over the hill, and was pleased to see how far I had walked on the previous day. The serious Scottish disposition of my hosts showed itself after my supper. They began to question me about my views on politics, shewed me that they considered me an ignorant Southerner with no opinions worth mentioning, and subjected me to harangues on Ramsay Macdonald and Baldwin. I was struck, as I listened to them in a drowsy way, by their uncouthness compared with the Highlands I had been seeing the last few days at Balquhidder and Tyndrum. Apart from their heavy guttural voices, they were much less considerate of the feelings and possible opinions of their listener than had been the kindly, dignified people with whom I had last been talking.

It is not graceful for me to complain of the manners of these people who were so kind as to be my hosts for one night. But I don't complain of their manners as distinct from other Lowlanders—nor, indeed, do I praise their hospitality more than I do that of the Scots nation—I am merely contrasting the sometimes blundering, insensitive behaviour of the Lowlander, as exemplified in these kindly people, with the perpetual courtesy of the Highlander.

In spite of my midday sleep I was very ready for my bed. I sat still on my improvised couch and let my mind wander halfway towards sleep while I was still being harangued. The door of the hut was open, and through the clouds of tobacco smoke I could just see out across the twilit wilderness. The ponderous dissertations, the tedious recollections, the occasional, oh, so dreary ! racy story, and the continual accompaniment of violent spitting (a nasty fault of the Scot) at first irritated me in its contrast with the loneliness of my day ; but the insignificance

of these things soon allowed them to be absorbed into the great surroundings, and I was conscious of the murmur of voices only in the same way as I was of the sound of the streams of the hillside. At last even this ended, and I slipped gratefully into my first night's sleep on the great moor of Rannoch feeling like a man who turns into his bunk on a ship afloat upon the Atlantic.

I started my next day's journey as early as could be expected of my tired body and was well on my way towards Rannoch Station before most people's cooks are beginning to think of cooking breakfast. When I reached this desolate but neat little stopping place for the daily passing trains, I had the, to me, odd experience of walking right through a railway station and never leaving the rails. No train was expected, and the platforms and booking-office were deserted ; so, without bothering to make even a pretence of leaving this ground on which I was trespassing, I held straight on between the " irons " and passed—a non-stop passenger through Rannoch.

This railway station was the only event worthy of notice in a tedious day. I was tired by my efforts of the previous twenty-four hours and began to find the endless moorland oppress me. In the afternoon, I penetrated into the more mountainous country which I supposed marked the edge of the moor. It made a contrast with the flatness of which I had had such a surfeit, but I was disappointed to find that it did not bring me into any more inhabited district ; not that I was hankering after company—indeed, I was longing for that unique kind of loneliness which I knew awaited me in the West Highlands—but merely that I was tired of this empty desolation. I felt that this moor was a land which had, when one had got over the first effect of its strange beauty, no personality ; it seemed, unless one was on the watch for it, to sap one's own. The East Highlands I do not care for, the West enchant me ; but this land through which I was now wandering lies indeterminate and without colour in between the two. Loch Treig, by which,

towards the end of the day, I found myself walking, is the best expression of this kind of scenery. It lies long, leaden and gloomy between two sulky ranges of what seemed to me very dull mountains. The railway climbs slowly up one of the banks of the loch and, toiling along the track, I looked down with distaste upon the distressing sheet of water, lying here so far from all sign of man save this stupid little railway.

As evening approached, the fineness of the day also began to decline, and in the west clouds gathered round a group of mountains which now began to loom up on my right, and which were, even at this distance, the largest which I had yet encountered. They were the mountains over against Fort William, and include the highest peak in Great Britain. The clouds did not look merely ornamental and so I was delighted to find that, shortly after I had passed the range at the head of Loch Treig and was launched upon a plain once more, there was a road running east and west. A mile or so to the left of this I knew that I should find Roy Bridge Inn and shelter from the threatening rain. The streams which I now passed were heavy with their long passage through the moor. They roared over wide falls, or plunged deeply and firmly into black pools which, reflecting the lowering sky and absorbing the peat from their banks, seemed like great wells of foaming ink.

I was very glad to reach Roy Bridge Inn and enjoyed not only a good meal and wine, but also the luxury of a basin of hot water, in which I washed my aching feet. There was only one other occupant of the inn, and him I did not encounter until I was full of food and longing for sleep. He was, however, so amusing and agreeable that I soon abandoned any idea of bed before midnight, and sat talking with him while the rain streamed down the windows, which were sapphirine in this late twilight.

VII

He was a commercial traveller making for his regular beat in the West Highlands. Now a West Highland commercial traveller is a remarkable person. The ordinary, rather pathetic and often very agreeable commercial travellers whom one meets in trains in England, and who are the heroes of innumerable doubtful stories, all beginning : " There was once a commercial traveller in a railway carriage . . . " have many estimable qualities—but they are not remarkable. They are kindly and, in a ponderous way, amusing ; but they do not keep sleepy strangers out of their beds by the exercise of unconscious charm.

A West Highland commercial traveller is, however, a man whose whole livelihood depends upon his vivacious and unaffected charm. He has to do more than persuade nice, quiet little shopkeepers in South country towns to buy a particular kind of thing they don't want. He has to deal with a romantic and remote peasantry on the shores of lochs and in Atlantic islands : a peasantry who are passionately hospitable to the stranger and the friend, but who are suspicious of the bagman and the Englishman. The West Highland commercial traveller has, therefore, to approach as a stranger, and then by the charm and the vivacity of his manner make himself so much a friend that he can for ever after appear in this light to these particular people again. He must be bilingual, for many of his clients have only the Gaelic ; he must have no easy tricks of a hearty manner ; there must be no slappings on the back and bull-like roars of : " How are you, old chap ? " Nor must he ever be shy and at a loss for the word. Embarrassment would make his clients uneasy, boisterousness repel them. Sometimes he will be so far afield that the direct method of barter will appeal most to the natives, and he will exchange his packets of tea, or whatever it is, for yards of the odorous

and rich-looking tweed which the remoter Islanders weave and which are so beloved by London stockbrokers. Dealing with remote peoples, who have not only the sensitiveness of the Celt but the wisdom of a lonely race, he must have one element of the gentleman—he must neither condescend to, nor be afraid of those who are less *au fait* with the world than he is. Let me say at once that he is himself usually no romantic or even impressive figure ; he preserves the splendid bounderdom of his kind when he is amongst his kind, or away from the Highlanders ; but he has a genius, a hidden quality, which on his travels emerges out of his pre-urban ancestry and makes admirable that trade which we are accustomed to look upon with such contempt.

I was not aware of these qualities in the West Highland commercial traveller when I sat in the little bar at Roy Bridge Inn, for at first I saw nothing worthy of remark in my companion, and I had not seen the type at work, as I did afterwards in the Outer Hebrides. My friend was a little cock sparrow of a man of about fifty, with vivacious eyes and a funny mobile mouth. I, at first, thought I was going to be bored by him, for he had the unmistakable see-saw Glasgow accent ; and at that time I was stupid enough to despise Glasgow and looked with distaste upon anyone obviously coming from what seemed to me just a festering wound on the west side of Scotland. Later on, on my return, as I passed through Glasgow, I was humiliated to find a great deal that stimulated and amused me in the contradictory city. But up till then, Glasgow merely seemed to me an epitome of all that was vulgar, cheap, and aggressive in the Scottish nation. At the word " Glasgow " there was called up to my mind's eye either a vision of the dreary industrialism of the dockyards, or one of a huge hall full of ugly men, with big jaws and sweat-shiny faces, singing—community singing :

> " I'll tak the high road and ye'll tak the low road,
> And I'll be in Scotland afore ye . . . "

or other songs about "Bonny Scotland." I now apologize for thinking that ; and assure myself, and the public, that Scottish vulgarity (than which there is nothing more vulgar in the world), and Scottish community patriotism (which is unspeakable), is by no means the product of or mainly confined to Glasgow. It is a disease to be found anywhere where two or three of the worst Scotsmen are gathered together—and they do that all over the place.

This little man, with his quick eyes and perpetually humorous mouth, was, as even I soon perceived, a very different piece of work. He reminded me of those impertinent little Glasgow Boy Scouts whom John Buchan writes about—capable of the more vigorous and amusing side of Glasgow vulgarity, but quite incapable of the Glasgow mass sentimentality, which has no good side and is merely the complement to Glasgow brutality. I forget how we got into conversation, for at the beginning I was too sleepy to remember much. I think he showed his curiosity at my bedraggled and exhausted appearance ; for the Scots, even the most respectable of them, have an affection for vagabondage, which was frequently discovering itself to me in the half-envious curiosity which my now very shabby look awoke in the people I met on the way. I must say here—so fearful am I of being thought to play without true qualification the picaresque rôle—that there was about me no romantic abandonment of dress or manner, induced by carefully exposed rents in my clothes, or dishevelled hair. It was merely that my tiredness, my clothes too rough to demand care, my healthy and now sunburnt skin, spoke of a freedom of purpose and direction, appealing to the savage which, as I have already said, lies so near the surface of the Scotsman's mind.

The little commercial traveller then, I think, in some such way opened the conversation with me. My vanity, which is never sleepy, aroused the rest of me ; and I soon was talking to him about travel, about France, the Germanies, and, finally, about Scotland. He showed

such detailed knowledge of the parts of the country into which I was going—of the Western Highlands and Islands—of the names of all the most interesting people to see in the most remote villages, that my curiosity silenced me and allowed me to listen to story after story (not particularly amusing in themselves, but catching something from his own vivacity), of his bartering travels in Skye, Morar, Sutherland, and the Outer Hebrides. Frequently he would return in his narratives, as he did in his journeys, to the respectable Glasgow suburb which was his home ; and would tell me of the local "footba' club," of which he was evidently the doyen and for which he used to go through the extremely risky feat of refereeing. I had often seen jokes in the comic papers about the dangers of refereeing, but had supposed them to be would-be humorous exaggerations, like the jokes about people being killed in the fight for 'buses and tubes. If only one learned to take one's "Punch" a little more seriously, what a lot one would learn ! Now, however, I was enchanted by and, indeed, believed the sagas of the Gorbals' football club referee, and perceived that what I had always looked upon as incredible happened every Saturday afternoon in Glasgow. My friend at the end of his stories used to twist up his lips into a squeezed and contorted smile, as if he had been sucking a lemon. This was impressive as well as being funny, and made one wonder how much that smile meant and what that was in words inexpressible was contained in that curious grimace. There was about the man a neatness, a precision of manner, which made very ridiculous the thought of him being subjected to physical indignities every Saturday afternoon. After one story of how he had been removed from the pavilion and out of the football ground hidden in a laundry basket so that he should escape the fury of the crowd, he drew up his lips into so strange a contortion, and for so long a time, that I laughed loudly to his face and was relieved to see that he joined me easily and unoffendedly. After that he perceived his

own genius—or that element of it that amused me—and told stories, all of which ended up with his own discomfiture and all of which were crowned with the contortion and the laugh. It was three o'clock before we went to bed.

The next morning broke for me very cheerless. The hopeless grey that is not quite white of a Highland mist pressed against my bedroom window-pane. I had been too tired to sleep well and I awoke at an indeterminate hour that was neither early nor late. It was not so late that I could console myself with the thought that in fact, if not in sense, I had had many hours' sleep ; it was not so early that I could turn over and say to myself, " If you cannot sleep any more you can at least rest." I got out of bed and came downstairs, knowing that only the rich quality of a Scottish breakfast could revive me to anything like my normal energy.

I had, however, not only this consolation awaiting me, but also a very kindly offer from my little companion, the cause of my exhaustion. He, who had already breakfasted, was waiting for me, and upon my arrival offered to give me a lift on to the shores of Loch Lochy in his car. I was tired. I had childish memories (possibly quite unjust) that told me that the country between Loch Lochy and Roy Bridge was dull, the weather was horrible and above all I liked the companionship of my lift offerer : so I accepted.

I was delighted when I saw the car in which we were to drive. I am the most ignorant man in the world on the make of motor-cars. But even I could tell that this was the cheapest of cheap American kinds and it seemed to me to be quite literally held together with pieces of string. He told me that he used this car as far as it would take him—that is up to about Morar, and that a little farther north; when he set sail for the outer islands he would leave it at Mallaig. In spite of the string and the cheapness, it consisted miraculously and survived the most remarkable driving. The Highland roads towards the north

and west are, even in spite of recent improvements, none too good, thank God! and every now and again little hollows and ridges run across the roads, which make the average driver slow up. Not so my little commercial. He seemed to treat his car as if it were a horse and took it up to its jumps with increased speed. He almost lashed it on when he saw a ridge some yards ahead, and it was surprising how easily we crashed over, and sometimes it seemed to me through the obstacles in our path.

The fine rain and mist obscured the view, and so I was incapable of judging how true had been my suspicion that this was going to be dull country. Loch Lochy was in a way magnificent; but its length, greyness, and the unending steepness of the hills that dropped into it, would have made it very monotonous for me had I walked. The day passed uneventfully and I was taken (for a foot passenger) far out of my path. We did not cover very many miles, for my friend had to make innumerable calls at obscure places. I was, however, eventually landed at a village which left me in a not too unfavourable position to continue my walk westwards towards Glen Shiel on the next day.

On some of the business calls I accompanied my friend so as to see him actually on the job. I despair of being able to describe his manner of persuasion. It was partly an application of his natural Gaelic ease and charm, and partly the use of a genius for understanding what would please those to whom he was talking. By this genius, which he loved to exercise, even when not for profit, he had found out from me that I was most amused by his vivacity and by the thought of his being placed in undignified positions. It was this discovery on his part that had enabled him to keep me up till three that morning. As with me he used the stories of his football experiences, so with a crofter or village shopkeeper he would make a quite direct appeal to the emotion of surprise, caution, friendliness or whatever else that he knew was dominant in his client's mind. I perhaps make him

out too much of a play-actor and to counteract this impression let me say at once that to whomever he was appealing he always remained in appearance, gesture and manner the perky, little vivacious Glasgow tradesman that he was by nature. He was never so crude as to change his voice, save when he had occasion to use the Gaelic. It was only the things he said, the sentiments which he attacked in his audience that changed. He was too clever to rely upon the use of any personality in manner save his own natural one.

When we were approaching in the not very late and foggy afternoon the place where we proposed to spend the night, we learnt that the local Member of Parliament was expected to arrive. This man, as it turned out afterwards, was to make a speech at the village hall at the beginning of a small local concert. We heard a good deal about this concert from the clients as we got nearer our destination and passed quite a number of Highlanders walking in on their way to the festivities. About a mile from the village we stopped the car and offered a lift to two fine-looking girls accompanied by their brother. The commercial, who loved to show off his vivacity to the sex, said to the young man, " Can you drive, mannie ? " And upon hearing " Yes," at once surrendered the wheel to him (for I had long ago told him that I could not drive) and got into the back seat along with me and the two girls. I was at once very much cold-shouldered. I had not been getting on very well with them, for I am shy of women at the best of times, but now I was confronted with two handsome-looking girls who to whatever I said would only reply " Yessss " with that fading sibilance, which however charming to listen to, is not the best thing for dispelling shyness. My friend quickly took the situation in hand, and sitting down between them put an arm round each of their waists and poured forth a series of Glasgow music-hall songs about being " happy where the girls are " and others of that kind. They were soon, of course, giggling happily, and what with the

banging, rattling of the car, the unending songs of the commercial, the giggling of the girls, and my own laughter, we approached the village in a fairly gay and somewhat ludicrous way.

As we turned the corner and swung into the little street we saw gathered together in a little knot by the school-house a collection of the local worthies, headed by the minister. They were evidently awaiting the arrival of the legislator. I felt a little embarrassed to come before this austere gathering in such a way, but my friend at once leapt to the occasion again.

He did not stop his singing and did not remove his arms from the girls' waists, but as the car drew up by the school-house, shouted out "Good-evening to you, gentlemen. I'm glad to see so many of my constituents here to welcome me." This was said in that absurd voice which a Scotsman assumes when he imagines himself to be imitating the haw-haw type of Englishman. He then stood up in the car, and thrusting one hand under his overcoat tails, started to make a speech. There was a pause amongst the waiting crowd. Many of them I could see either recognized the commercial from his previous visits or suspected on other grounds that this funny little creature, now more than ever looking like a cock-sparrow with his tail thrust out, could not be the man they were waiting to welcome. The minister, however, who was new to the district and who had evidently been deputed to be the one to do the welcoming, waited irresolutely. He did not dare to take no notice—for he clearly did not know the Member by sight—and it was just possible that this gesticulating little absurdity might be he arrived drunk, also he could not overcome his suspicion sufficiently to make an overture of greeting, which would commit him. The minister stood at the front of the crowd and those at the back who knew for certain that this was not the Member, were, for the moment, not bold enough to come forward and say so to their deputed chief. They could not believe that he

would be taken in : they waited for him to make the first move, either of anger or amusement. I do not suppose that the whole scene lasted more than two minutes, but to the giggling girls and to me, uneasy and ashamed, it seemed to go on for hours.

The speech was a not very successful, but certainly vivacious, imitation of the platitudinous nonsense that is usually produced on such occasions. After a minute the minister, so it seemed to me, made up his mind that this was a fraud and was about to move away, when his suspicions on the other side—that this might really be the Member, but in a state of drunkenness—were aroused by the conclusion of the speech, in which my friend in the name of the Liberal Party invited the entire village to come with him to the hotel bar and have a drink. He added, as he saw the eye of the hotel proprietor, whom he knew, brightening at this tremendous invitation, that he had unfortunately no money with him, but would ask Donald MacLean to put the whole account down to the Lloyd George fund. At this Donald, the hotel proprietor, gave such a shout of laughter that without any abrupt or unpleasant exposure the whole thing was quite easily and suddenly taken by everyone as a joke, and those who had been taken in at the start, anxious that their gullibility should not be discovered, were the loudest and most genial in their expression of amusement. Those who knew my friend came forward to greet him and introduced him to the minister, who to my admiration did not show any annoyance. The whole party then, with that carelessness for time-tables and programmes which is the mark of the Celt all over the British Isles, left the school-house where they had gathered to greet the approaching Member of Parliament, and wandered towards the hotel where Donald was soon busy dealing out whiskies in the bar and in the sitting-room.

The day had been cold and misty, my blood was chilled by sitting in the car, so I settled down with great satisfaction to my warming drink—I had chosen that most

delicious of all warm drinks—a rum and hot milk—and looked at my surroundings with pleasure. We were in a warm, well-furnished room with deep rugs on the floor to welcome the feet and many " trophies of the chase," as they are always called, hung on the wall to interest the eye. Highland hotels may be expensive, but they never have a mean effect. The profession of innkeeper has always been considered a gentlemanly one in the North of Scotland, either (as David Balfour said) because of the tradition of Highland hospitality, or because the profession is one which allows one to be fairly successful and at the same time drunken and lazy. The result is that the " Great Hall " or reception room of many Highland hotels looks as if it belonged to a great gentleman's house. It is large, gives off an air of comfort, and unbelievably fat salmon in glass cases ornament the walls ; while the proud heads of the red deer stare at one out of the lofty gloom. The chairs and sofas are always comfortable, the whisky admirable.

This room in which I now found myself looked very well with the tall Highland farmers and estate agents clad in their thick tweeds which smelt deliciously because of the mist in the air. They were standing about and talking in that soft, almost feminine, voice which the strongest of Highlanders always has. I, who was near the fire, noticed that my friend was in another corner of the room talking to a group of men, and now and again the conversation amongst them seemed to turn on me, for I noticed that they looked at me frequently ; and at last one of them, whom I afterwards learnt to be the schoolmaster, began to come towards me when his progress was interrupted by the arrival of the real Member of Parliament. This man, in the amusement and excitement of our piece of impertinence, had been almost forgotten, and I think his pomposity was a little wounded by the lack of anyone to meet him in the road. The schoolmaster, I thought rather tactlessly, offered as an explanation for this the story of my friend's ridiculous impersonation, and

added that after such a good piece of fun it was only to be expected that everyone would come in and have a drink. I did not see how the Member took it, for he was snatched away from my part of the room to be introduced to the minister and the impersonator, and all I could see was his black-coated back bowing over the hands.

The schoolmaster then announced that as the evening was coming on we had better move down to the schoolhouse, where the concert was to be held and the speeches made. As people began to go out of the room and I to wonder if I should follow them to the concert, he came up to me and said :

" Can you tell me now, sir : is it not true that you are a great comic ? "

" There's none alive that's greater," I replied, not quite getting what he was driving at, " and as I know none that's dead, that's the highest praise I have."

" Ah, that's true, that's true," continued the schoolmaster in that clear Inverness-shire voice which quite evades any of the usual hackneyed attempts at phonetic dialect spelling so beloved by the local colourists. " And now so kind a gentleman as yourself even though he is on holiday will not grudge to help me in my concert. We have a fine piper, a fine Gaelic singer, a piano player and a reciter, but the people here are sad for the want of a comic."

As soon as I understood what he wanted I began the usual process of polite refusal when, to my disgust, my commercial friend came up to the group that was beginning to gather round me and said :

" He'll sing for ye, gentlemen, only don't press the little man too far. He's the finest coamic in Gorbals and that's saying all I can. Ye'll sing them yon coamic song you gave me last night," he said turning to me. I remembered in confusion that I had been so warmed and genial at Roy Bridge the previous night that I had sung my French song. And here I made my fatal mistake. Instead of flatly denying that I could sing a note I went on, with deprecatory gestures and noises, to imply that I

may have sung or squealed a note or two, but that sort of thing was merely a bar-parlour trick and was no use for singing before an audience. I soon understood my error when they all closed in on me and said that that was all nonsense. This was not the Albert Hall and any old comic song was good enough to go down. In vain, I protested that I could not sing before an audience at all ; that the song was not a comic one.

" Coamic ! " said the commercial with a wicked wink at me. " Coamic ! I laughed till I was nearly deid. Ye're jist bashful, my friend. Get him on the platform, gentlemen, and he'll bring the house down."

Now there was so much talking and general noise that I almost hoped that in the confusion the whole project might drop, and remained silent neither consenting nor denying. And then without given reason or apparent impetus, the crowd began to move off to the hall where I gathered the meeting and concert were to take place. It is one of the most amusing and, to the Saxon, most irritating qualities of the Celt that he can, contemptuous of time, leave an arrangement unfinished, a discussion, an essential argument unclinched, hanging in the air and move off, implying that in some unspoken way everything has been made clear. The initiated (so will his maddening behaviour suggest) are now, by some secret understanding, all at one, and there is no further need with clumsy words and reiteration to make redundant what has already been so easily comprehended by the subtle. It was in this way that the crowd around me in the height of the talk and babble melted away : and I was left wondering whether I had offended by my downrightness of refusal or weakly given in through my timidity.

When the hotel was quite empty, save for servants, I had another whisky to fortify me and settled down in front of the fire. I decided that clearly I was not expected to do anything. Even Celtic casualness could not suppose that I had really consented to make a fool of myself in public to amuse these dignified villagers. I

should, after the speech was over, go down myself and sit at the back of the hall. I knew how easily Highland enthusiasm was aroused and how easily it could be deflected. I should be allowed to sit quietly and listen to what promised to be an amusing exhibition of local manners and customs. So, quite full of courage, I came out of the hotel at about six o'clock and walked down the collection of few houses which served as a street, and, deciding to while away a few minutes so that the concert might be in full swing before I entered, I went into the little post-office cum general stores to buy a few stamps, postcards, and bars of chocolate for my next day's journey.

The post-office was just about to close, for the proprietor of the little cottage, a charming old Highlander with a voice as soft as a child's, was evidently anxious to seize the very first moment to be off to the concert. There were two little girls standing in the shop as I entered, who, with the slow, unspeaking, ungiggling curiosity which Northern children seem always to have, looked at me long and embarrassingly. At last one of them broke silence, and I heard her say to her companion in that slow whispering voice, for the sounds and meanings of which I was already becoming so sharp: "Jeannie, yon's the hoamic." The last word, which was intended to be "comic," was drawn out incredibly long on the first syllable and through the whole sentence there ran the sighing sound of the Gaelic speech.

"My children," I said as I struck a foolishly affected attitude, "daughters of my friends, let me assure you that however comic I may look, however well may your fathers have entertained me to their admirable whisky, however melodiously may your handsome brothers have besought me, nothing is going to persuade me to expose myself to the laughter of this happy valley." The only reply to this remark was a repetition—this time as if in explanation of my folly: "Jeannie, yon's the hoamic."

I began to be surprised at this certainty of my "hoamicality," and turned to ask the proprietor of the shop how

these children had got to know that I had already been badgered to make a fool of myself, when the bill for the concert caught my eye and there—in letters two inches deep and in ink that was hardly dry—I saw my name at the foot of the advertisement, with the words : " Humorous Entertainer " written after it. I was at first so staggered that I had no time to be either angry or amused. However, when I recovered from my surprise and had questioned the old man behind the counter as to who had done this thing, I began to feel half annoyed, half inclined to laugh. The combination of these two emotions drove me to say to myself that I should certainly now go down to the hall to amuse myself—I should not be intimidated by this sort of thing—but that nothing would induce me to get on the platform to sing, dance, make faces, or in any other way make more ridiculous the figure which I felt myself now already to cut.

I returned to the hotel, collected a few cigarettes, had a wash-and-brush-up so as to appear creditably in this social gathering, and then marched boldly down to the hall. As I entered the schoolroom a song from the Gaelic singer had just ended, and the great applause with which these polite Celts always greet any attempt to entertain them had died away. I could not have chosen a more unfortunate moment. The song being just over, there was a pause of silence which allowed my entry to be noticed on all sides. Everyone could turn to the door without seeming to be rude to the platform—and everyone did. Now the country concert-goers love a comic entertainer. Their healthy taste is not very sentimental ; and though these people, who to my alarmed fancy seemed to fill a hall as large as the Albert Hall and fill it densely, were not so lacking in perception as to be exactly bored by the quite excellent music of its kind which they had heard that evening, they were beginning to hunger for new things. Sentimental songs, especially traditional sentimental songs (and here I use " sentimental " in the best sense), could be sung in the home or, to give such a feat

its modern equivalent, be heard on the wireless. But the full-blooded communal joy of laughing at a comic entertainer could only be enjoyed in the schoolroom hall at one of these only too rare concerts. I, therefore, as the supposed comic, or " hoamic " as the sighing children had called me, was the *pièce de résistance* of the evening. I was more than welcome. I was hailed as a relief : the hopeful sign of a joyful remainder of the entertainment. Upon my entrance the whole room burst like a bomb into thunderous applause.

VIII

For the moment I stood silent. I did not know quite what to do. I longed to turn and fly, but had not sufficient determination to do so. I looked about me for a seat. There was not a square inch of room for me to sit and as no one seemed to offer me any help, but merely to continue to deafen me with the terrific noise. I was angry enough to stand quite motionless with my back against the wall assuming what I supposed to be a stern expression, but which I was afterwards informed made me look like a simpering *prima donna*. I had stood thus for fully twenty seconds before I saw my commercial friend, who, sitting on the platform surrounded by a crowd of local celebrities, was beckoning me up to a vacant chair which stood by his side. For the moment my chief feeling was one of intense relief that I should at last find somewhere to sit down and no longer remain a standing cynosure. I had started down the aisle—middle passage or whatever you like to call it—before I realized that to take a seat on the platform committed me to take some active part in the entertainment. My movement was the signal for the applause to die away. The crowd was awaiting my appearance quite definitely in front of them before they would applaud again.

I was confused. The mass of white faces, the clouds of

tobacco smoke, the sudden noise and its equally sudden dying away, all combined to unnerve me, and as I walked down the aisle, with what I supposed to be a dignified gait, I lost my sense of direction and did not look where I was going. One of the benches or school forms was unfortunately slightly projecting on to the gangway, and, with my eyes loftily fixed on the platform above I ignored this solid obstruction to my progress. I stumbled badly over it ; luckily I did not bark my shin, for my toe hit the lower woodwork first, but this very fact, in my unconscious effort to save my shin, made my consequent fall look all the more ridiculous. I stooped forward from the waist holding the lower half of my back, so that my posterior stuck out, while with outstretched fingers I touched the floor in front of me. I looked as if I was going through the morning exercise of trying to touch my toes without bending my knees. Before I had risen to a standing position again, the whole room was in such a shouting roar of applause that for a moment I feared that I had somehow angered the crowd. Only when I had attained the platform and faced the crowd in sitting down did I understand that I was considered to have done a very witty thing.

The schoolmaster then rose to his feet and began to address the audience. He said that everyone was very grateful for the fine songs that Mr. MacLean had sung, and for the fine piping and story-telling that had been given that evening, and now, though he had arrived a little late, Mr. Moray McLaren—and that was a good Scots name (great applause)—was going to put the great last touch on the evening's entertainment by giving a few of his comic turns. At this point I rose, having made up my mind at last, and courageously, to put an end to this nightmare of embarrassment, and began to speak. I fear I interrupted the schoolmaster who, if I had given him time, would have arranged the platform for me and enquired whether I needed a piano accompaniment. However, I determined to speak out loud and clearly and

finish with it. I forget my exact words : they were something about " a very ridiculous mistake," " a comic appearance, but not a comic gift," and many other stammering *clichés*. I have a voice that becomes, when I am nervous, strained and high pitched : it accentuates what the Scots would call the " English accent " in it and it sounds just as if I was putting it on. I hesitate for words, but not for sounds, and my sentences are interpolated with meaningless interjections which embarrass some and amuse others.

Now the Scottish Highlanders are a sympathetic and easily embarrassed race. Had they known that I was really uncomfortable and anxious to be rid of this business, these people in the school-room would have let me go without a murmur and would, I am sure, with touching solicitude for my feelings, have done everything to smooth over any awkwardness that might have arisen. They did not, unfortunately, know that I was embarrassed : they had been expecting a rich Glasgow accent—for they knew I was a friend of the commercial's. Instead, they heard an ordinary Southern English voice, exaggerated and broken up by absurd noises. And they, of course, concluded that I was trying to be funny. You must remember my appearance. I was shabby, rough, and tired-looking. I had the most monstrous boots, which I use for walking in, but of a kind which reasonable people use for gardening in unreclaimed swamps. These boots, in the bright light, seemed, to my feverish fancy, to curl up at the toes and swell out on both sides until they made me into a Charlie Chaplin. I still had a heavy walking-stick in my hand, and my loose felt hat was lying beside my chair. I looked, and felt, the word " fool " incarnate. And yet I was talking in accents which these Highlanders had only been accustomed to hear on the lips of the rather idiotic and always despised stockbroker shooting-tenants who came up each August and shot over their moors. Clearly I was trying to be funny. I was that exquisite fool, the music-hall comedian, who,

with a bashed-in top-hat, the remains of rags round his ankles which he calls his "white spats," and a mass of indescribable clothing in between which he calls his suit, loudly proclaims in each chorus of his humorous song :

"I was brought up at Eton and Oxford, I was."

I was mocking those who deserved to be mocked. I was doing it well. I was a crashing success.

As soon as I understood this, I sat down angrily and, unfortunately for me, rather noisily. There are moments of which the embarrassment will last to the end of my life. The one that followed can, as I write some months later, still bring upon me the visible signs of confusion. It was unbearable. It had aroused in me a mixture of obstinacy and cowardice. I refused to admit the possibility of flight now, but I also was too frightened to do so bold a thing as to walk right out of the hall. So I just sat on facing the audience, with the applause gradually dying away from around me, and felt that I was nearer to tears than I had been for years. I was too distressed to be angry, too confused to know what to do.

Before the last note of applause had ended, I was aware of a stir beside me on the platform, and then the sudden intrusion of an extraordinary noise. I looked up and saw that my little commercial friend had advanced to the front of the platform and was doing a turn.

He jerked his funny little arms up and down the few feet to spare on either side of him, and poured out such a confusion of tuneless words in a squealing voice that I have long forgotten even the few that I caught. I only remember that the refrain of the song was something about :

"I'm not particular, tic-tic-ticular,"

and that the end of each verse was accompanied by a gesture which I never thought to have seen made in public.

At last the torrent of words came to an end, and even above the noise of the delighted crowd I could hear the

gasps of the singer recovering his breath—he afterwards described himself to me as being " puffed to the world." I was glad of his temporary relief to my embarrassment ; but, as the applause continued, I began again to feel that I was being called upon to do a turn. It was evident that the audience considered us a pair : a comic couple who had prepared a scene together beforehand. Now, so they considered, it was my turn to come forward again and, ceasing to go on with my absurd imitation of an Englishman speaking, to give them, as had my commercial friend, a real bit of Glasgow music-hall stuff.

My friend perceived this wish on the part of the crowd and held up his hand for silence. Then, in a voice still wheezy from the effort of his song, began to speak, his words drawn out and accentuated in that Glasgow fashion which always seems to me so ludicrous :

" Ladies and gentlemen," he said, " I owe both of you and my friend here, an apology. My friend is no more a professional comic than I am a discharged meenister, and I don't know why I thought it funny to tell you he was. When I heard him speaking away there trying to tell you he was sorry he could not make a fool of himself for you, and you roaring at his ordinary words thinking them funny, I was that sorry for the lad, who's no more than an ordinary one on holiday. And so, ladies and gentlemen, I could only try and please you and make up to my friend by singing you a song that's more stupid than funny and which you were kind enough to like. Now that I have some wind in my throat and some courage about me, I shall go on to tell you a story."

Here the little man began to tell them a series of quite funny little Glasgow *contes*—the kind of thing that he had amused me with the evening before at Roy Bridge—and accompanied his telling with a profusion of comic gestures and postures. All the anger that I had preserved from my confusion now melted in the sight of this generosity ; the embarrassment that I had felt in facing the crowd ebbed away from me in the surge of relief that

swept over me ; and there were no louder laughs, nor more genuine feet stampings and hand clappings in the crowd than those which came from me.

I forget exactly how the concert ended. We had one more serious song, one more speech about some local matters. The Member stood up and made a few fatuous remarks, there was a general confusion of singing and talking, and then we all melted out into the mist-laden night. The Highlanders, with that swinging, patient gait, streamed in small groups down the valley away from the hall and the hotel. There was no talking on the doorstep, nor waiting for each other : as soon as each person had had one breath of the open air, he turned straight for home. I was soon alone ; and not wishing immediately to face my companions in the hotel, I turned away due north for a short walk.

The blackness and the mist obscured all my surroundings from me. But, as one feels through none of the five senses the presence of a person in a darkened room, so I was aware of the mountains that hung over me on either side of me and felt something of the coldness of the deep black loch which I knew to lie a little farther down the glen. A few minutes of this lovely Highland night sufficed to calm me, and I turned back again after a quarter of an hour and went into the hotel, where, after a few words with my friend, I retired to bed quite happy again.

IX

At breakfast the next day the commercial told me that he was going into Inverness ; but I was not to be lured any farther eastwards. So I said a very genuine goodbye to the remarkable little man, and made my course for the West coast. I was thirsty for the sea, for that best, most romantic and mysterious of all seas, that Atlantic (tamed by the Hebrides and western rocks of Scotland)

which wanders in long, deep, clean channels into the heart of the Highlands. The sea is more beautiful here than anywhere else in the world, I think. And the mountains which it invades are certainly more lovely than any others in Scotland. They endure days of drenching rain and sea mist, but when this passes, which may happen in five minutes, they emerge soft and forgiving, the amiable sunshine of this district discovers them heavy and coloured with the flowers, heather and greenery of the gentle West. There is nothing harsh or bleak about them, and even in those places where the soil lies thinly upon the rock, where the vegetation is subdued to delicate pink flowers and the deep grey-green of lichen and weed, where huge rocks troop out to face the endless sea there is no sense of desolation. In some way which you cannot define this is a fruitful land. The grim, unfriendly farmer of the East with his fair hair, his huge jaw, his Scandinavian soul, may wring more produce from his Fifeshire land ; but these painted mountains, these lovely, lonely valleys have long been the refuge of the less industrious, the pursued, the dying Celt whose movement has always been to the West. And whether the West has of itself contributed to the Celtic character the elements of mystery and of loneliness, or whether in the centuries in which he has filled this land the Celt has charged the atmosphere with his own psychic qualities, I do not know. But be you Celt or Saxon, you now need only have subtlety and good sense to feel as you explore into the North the irresistible pull to the West where all these admirable things are to be found.

The Celtic Highlander has always had a legend about the West. Conscious of his own movement, or, to put it less romantically, of his enforced propulsion to that quarter, he has idealized this tendency, and has, for centuries, spoken about an island far out in the West where the souls of the blessed warriors go after death : a kind of Celtic Valhalla which has as its basis the prospect, to the driven Celt, of the infinite ocean sprinkled almost

infinitely far out with the scattered archipelago of the Hebrides. It is sad to think how many of the Celts, so brutally evicted from their land in the nineteenth century, found this Island of the Blest rather more quickly than they had expected, and discovered it to be less romantically comfortable than they had dreamed. The United States of America has many fine qualities, but it is not a good Valhalla.

I saw what amused me very much in an American paper the other day. It was one of those American snob weeklies very full of "chic" and smart knowledge about Europe. I turned to the etiquette page and saw in the middle of it a large photograph of a Highlander in full regalia. The caption underneath the picture ran as follows :

> "We are happy to be able to inform our readers that the Mac—— of A——, who is shown above, will contribute a weekly feature to our etiquette page. The Mac—— of A—— is a real old Highland chieftain and is redolent with the quaint old-world courtesy of his race. This week he will describe the correct way to enter a drawing-room."

The Mac——of A—— is, I may say, the descendant of one of the most ancient untitled lines of Scotland. He can trace his direct ancestry back to a period centuries before the English Howards and Percies were heard of. It was amusing to think of this child of a thousand island pirates being employed to teach American "young missises" how to enter a drawing-room. The Island of the Blest has a strange power of transformation.

It was to the West, then, that I turned, and leaving the Caledonian Canal to pursue its, to me, rather monotonous course up to Inverness, I entered the dark and wooded hill country which lies around Invergarry. This is the land of Cameron of Lochiel, beautiful, but sombrely lonely. I did not dare to leave the roads for the mist kept

sweeping past in patches and would quite suddenly obscure everything around me. Even when the light was clear I could not see far ahead of me as the trees, heavy with their summer leaves and dripping from the mist and rain which they held, hung over the road and made a mournful tunnel. Now and again I would come out into the open, but when I did, the prospect was not very cheerful; it reminded me of the " Romantick " view of Germany, of eighteenth-century illustrations to a Walpolian novel. Wooded crags hung high up on the mountain sides, over which their silvery " cascades " tumbled to hide themselves in a mass of gloomily green conifers of which I do not know the name. I should not care to live in this part ; to look at, it does not seem as if it would ever catch the real sunshine which anywhere in the true West consoles for the weeks of rain and mist. I am told that a most admirable kind of people inhabit these hills, but I did not meet a single one ; and my mind kept running on the depressing monument which I had passed earlier in the day on the shores of some long grey loch. This monument marks the place of a most delicate incident in a piece of clan revenge in the seventeenth century. To a clan chief there were being brought the heads of seven of another clan as a vengeance for a murder. This monument marks the spring where these heads were washed before they were presented to the chief. I read the account of this written on the stone in French, Latin and English. The Gaelic version, I confess, was beyond me. For my skill in that emotional and proud language is restricted to the use of a few taproom expressions picked up in inns, and to a few useless words I learnt as a child. This monument on the edge of the dark wood set the tone for the atmosphere of the place and, though I admit I did not care a damn for those now distant and dead murderers and murdered, I somehow did not like it. The streams which I passed were full of deep and inky-black pools fringed with masses of stale yellow foam, the produce of the cataracts

which monotonously plunged into them. Later on in the year these pools are enlivened by the salmon which mount from the Caledonian Canal ; but I, in mid-June, hung over the bridges and looked into these black holes for any sign of life in vain. They seemed to me nothing but abysses of death ; they had motion, but it was movement of lifeless matter like that of the dead moon on its course through the sky.

At length I came to Invergarry hotel, a lonely inn for salmon fishers, comfortable but set deep in a black forest, which was made even more unprepossessing by the mist that now descended in real earnest. I drank a little of the very good whisky which they sell there and retired early to bed.

I was up early next morning, for I intended to reach Cluanie Inn by the next evening. I managed this quite easily, for I had mistaken the distance and arrived well before evening had begun. My route lay during the morning along Loch Garry, which still lies in the forest of dark pine trees. It is a pretty piece of water, but I was heartily sick of these endless trees by this time, and when I eventually came out into the open somewhere near the glen which precedes Glen Shiel, I could have cried out with the relief. Here I perceived that I was really coming down to the western side, and the desolation around me of huge treeless mountains began to assume that western quality which I have described. The road ran across a great swamp, or so it seemed to me, and slowly and painfully began its ascent up along the side of a long stretched-out mountain.

I fell in with a shepherd on this road who was driving his flock down to Loch Duich. I asked him if he minded my walking with him, and he very heartily and pleasantly invited me to accompany him. Our companionship was of that slow, unspoken kind which subsists on long silences broken only by a word here and there. He was a pleasant fellow whose remote life had shorn his speech of the silly redundant *clichés* that one hears on the lips of the

more " civilized " countrymen of the South. After we had been walking for an hour or two he questioned me a little about politics in the South, that invariable topic of interest to all Scotsmen. He clearly did not read the papers much, and he astonished me by referring to Lord X—— as a drunken swine. " Not that I'm always sober mysel'," he added with one of those huge, ponderous winks in which the lids kiss each other with almost a smacking sound like the lips of a gourmet describing a savoury dish. I was so surprised at his remark about Lord X—— that I asked him how he had come by the knowledge.

" Oh, I juist heard it on me traivels," he said, for he had the Lowland speech and had the slow, unexcitable manners of those people.

" Let me tell you then, sir," I said, " that you're quite right ; Lord X—— is not only a drunken lecherous swine, but a bullying cad as well, and I've no doubt that you've heard that on your travels also."

" Och ay, mebbe," was his pleasing reply. Whereupon I fell into a cheerful meditation upon the strength and correctness of that much despised and abused medium for the dissemination of knowledge—rumour. Here was the whole powerful screaming pontifical daily press shouting its news all over the United Kingdom and never letting out the fact that Lord X—— is the unpleasant beast that he is, if anything rather concealing it, for Lord X—— is a friend to the daily press. In spite of this supposed stranglehold upon truth, here was a plain unvarnished, brutal fact creeping silently from what Lloyd George once called " foul mouth to fouler ear". I have often suspected that truth, like beauty, if you leave it long enough in the hands of the common people, is preserved somewhere deep and hidden, and emerges eventually triumphant from some " foul mouth " to trumpet itself across the world. The bard made his song, it is crude, unfinished; its crudity is not preserved in writing but is handed over to the people after years of passing

from "foul mouth to fouler ear"; it is worn smooth and clear, and emerges as the beautiful folk song in which the professor and the pedant delight. None of those foul mouths or ears was capable of making the beauty of this song on its own, but together they have achieved the miracle. The corporate foul mouth can speak and the corporate foul ear can eventually appreciate beauty. In the same way I have often wondered whether rumour, if left to run its own sweet will, does not in the end work its way towards truth, and in its silent, subterranean progress undermine the huge structure of lies built by the Press.

A cheerful thought. It has often been remarked how popular legend in the end turns out to be more correct than the carefully pieced-together histories of the dry-as-dusts. And even before I had this startling example of the survival of truth from this remote old shepherd I had marvelled at the way those remarkable stories one hears in bars and places where they gossip, turn out to be so correct. How true it is that Lord X—— is all that the shepherd said he was, that Mr. Justice —— is worse than a charlatan, that Lord Z—— is something that I cannot write down. How true and how exactly the same are all the stories that one hears about them. Another proof of the care rumour takes of stories entrusted to her is the way in which doubtful stories turn up again and again in exactly the same form. One will hear in a London club a long and detailed risky story, let us say about the adventure of three commercial travellers in a railway carriage. Two years later, if one has taken the trouble to remember the story, one will hear it with exactly the same embellishing details in the public bar of an obscure Yorkshire hotel. This sort of thing sets one wondering how old some of these stories are. Did some bawdy Elizabethan first conceive of some of them? (Not, I grant you, of the ones about commercial travellers in trains.) And have they passed, after having been adorned in the Restoration period, into the traditions of

public-house wit to remain, now that they have achieved perfection—the same for ever ?

I walked on with the old shepherd, and after having told him always to believe what he heard by rumour but never what he saw in print, we held silence until we came down into the great valley of Glen Shiel.

It was down this glen that Dr. Johnson came with Boswell on his way to the Hebrides, and it was here (they came westwards from Inverness) that Johnson for the first time found himself in Highland scenery. The glen has changed hardly at all since that historic journey. At the foot of it the courageous but small clan of the Macreas still holds the land and has a fair showing of crofters who have resisted the evictions of the nineteenth century. The huge green hills of this western valley are still inviolate of new building, while that other and more tragic change common in the Highlands of the rightful buildings having been burnt down to make room for deer forests has also not taken place here ; for, according to Johnson's description there were no houses in this glen in his day until Loch Duich.*

It is not quite accurate to say that there have been no houses built since Johnson's day in Glen Shiel, for in the early nineteenth century someone built the Cluanie Bridge Inn, which stands at the head of the glen about a mile from Loch Cluanie. This is one of the most remarkable inns or houses that I have ever had the good fortune to encounter. It was built luckily just before the disease of spurious romanticism invaded the Highlands ; it is therefore of the true native style of Northern Scottish house of the eighteenth century. It is a small, unpretentious, whitewashed square house built in a formal manner according to the rules of deliberate symmetry and not according to the capricious shapes of mock baronial confusion. Its walls are thick, its windows have panes and are not slabs of plate glass ; it has a comfortable

* I have, since writing this, heard some grim stories about a proposed electric power station in Glen Shiel—it sounds incredible !

and well-designed little porch. From the distance (and you may see it from a long way off down the valley as you come over the shoulder of the hill from Invergarry), it looks like an English rectory of the Jane Austen period ; but when you approach it you notice an even stricter simplicity, a more solid air about it, so that it accords a little better with its wild surroundings than would a transplanted Jane Austen rectory—were so staid and respectable a building to take to such House-of-Lorreto-like tricks.

As I approached it in company with my shepherd friend, it seemed to me one of the most comfortable sights I had ever beheld. For two days I had been walking through pine forests and heavy Germanic scenery, occasionally passing under lodge gates of the detestable baronial style. And here I was, having run out into the open, my steps, having turned down the hill and westwards to the long expected Atlantic Ocean, at last encountering the building which expressed that which I was coming to look for. To begin with, its position is so remarkable to one accustomed to the South. It is about twelve miles away from "Tom Down," the nearest house on the east, and is over ten miles away from Loch Duich on the west, with no building in between. Yet it gives no appearance of desolation or loneliness. It stands neatly, dignifiedly, conscious of its own decorum and quietly miniature beauty in the midst of this immense wilderness of sweeping hills and glens. Its independence of spirit is so admirable : it reminds me of the man who, having been marooned on a desert island with all his baggage, takes the trouble to change into dress clothes every night for his evening meal. As I came near to it I perceived about it a faintly romantic air, quite undeliberate and unsought-after in its appearance. It is the expression in stone of that French *esprit* which so influenced the Highlands during the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries ; which gave to the wild emotional clansmen a curious gallantry of manner—

a gallantry to which their own temperament added a flavour of something strange and Northern, making it all a mixture which has fascinated the romanticists and sentimentalists ever since. This mixture has inspired some of the most embarrassingly sloppy as well as some of the most genuinely delightful literature of the nineteenth century. And God forbid that I should add to the sea of slop that has been expended on it, but I cannot help being a little enthusiastic about Cluanie Bridge Inn.

I have since discovered that there are many other inns on the western side of the Highlands which are built in this style and which express the *esprit* of which I have been babbling. But I have yet to discover any inn which is kept by so perfect a hostess as Mrs. MacDonald. I shall not embarrass that lady—if she should ever see this book—by enumerating her good qualities, nor shall I attempt to describe the kindliness of her hospitality which all who take the trouble to go and stay at Cluanie may enjoy. I will merely content myself by saying that if anyone who is reading this chapter has been so unfortunate as lately to have endured that depressing experience of having stayed a week-end with one of the rich hosts or hostesses, who now own most of the big houses in Scotland ; if he has suffered that humiliation of neglect, boredom and uneasiness interspersed with the acute anxiety of having had to endure practical jokes at any hour of the day or night, which are described afterwards in one's letter of thanks as having had " such a jolly time " ; if he has seen vulgar stupidity laughing at the patient dignity of those around it ; if he has had to put up with that form of rudeness known as unconventional easy manners ; if he has by these experiences been tempted to believe that hospitality has gone from off the face of the earth, then let him seek a balm for his wounded sensibilities by going to stay for a few days at the Cluanie Bridge Inn.

I may add that the outward and visible signs of this hospitality—the food, the wine, the hot water and the beds—are quite first-class in their simple way.

I left my companion at the door, for he could not leave his sheep even for a drink, and when I had settled down in the inn for an hour or two and rested, decided that I must stay two nights in this haven. The evening turned out to be fine and after dinner I took my glass of excellent white wine out of doors and sat on the bench, placed out in the roadway for weary travellers. It was a very comfortable situation to find myself in. The long Northern day, now made more beautiful by the gentle withdrawal of its moist beginnings, was drawing to an exquisite conclusion. These were the hills I had come to seek. They had, in the splendour of that incomparable evening everything that I had looked for in my pilgrimage to the West. The unreality, the mystery, the softness, the sad reaching out to the unattainable which is the essence of Celtic art, all were expressed for me in what I saw as I sat on the white painted seat outside this little white house. I will add that the delicious Southern wine in no way hindered the glow of appreciation. I raised my golden glass and eyed the sinking sun sentimentally through it. A thousand miles to the South of me that same sun (so I platitudinously thought) had warmed this noble juice into birth. And here in this Northern paradise—for I despair of describing the subtlety of its lonely beauty—that sun beheld from afar off the wine dying its glorious death in the guts of a Northerner ; this house, built under the French influence, these guardian hills sloping down to the Atlantic, the sun in its infinitely protracted death, this ennobling wine, this wholly admirable person drinking it, everything was perfect—house, wine, twilight, hills, self. What more can I want ? Some people might want friends. I don't want friends ; devoted to friends, no one likes friends better, but don't want them now alone in house, thank God ! Hills, and wine, and dear old Moray M'Laren, who's going to be such a great figure and write such good books—such a nice person in such a nice place. Who could want any more ? Which was nicer—place or person ? Doesn't matter : all parcel and

part—I mean part and parcel—of the same thing, whatever that may mean. Doesn't matter what it means. . . . Have another glass of wine : just enough in this second bottle. The great thing, my dear fellow, is to drink *good* wine, *good* wine, I say, and then it doesn't matter how much you drink. Good wine never hurt anyone, and anyone worthy of the name never hurt good wine. I'd like to meet the man who hurt good wine. I'd give him a piece of my mind. I love good wine : not in a selfish way—oh no, really love wine . . . darling wine . . . devoted to wine. . . . Everything's very rosy now ; reminds me, are there any roses about ? Oh no, of course, no roses in the Highlands. . . . Pity ! very fond of roses with my wine . . . comes from reading 1890 verses : " They are not long, the days of wine and roses." I'd love a good red rose, no, a yellow one . . . drinking yellow wine. What would happen if I was drinking stout or gin ? No black or transparent roses to go with it . . . and they talk about science ! Science can't produce a black or glassy one. God can produce a black or glassy rose, but science can't, therefore Religion better than Science. . . . That's not good logic . . . mustn't let prejudice run away with reason . . . devoted to reason. Oh, but I wish there were some yellow roses about. . . . These hills are getting a bit too much for me. . . . I'm a sensitive plant, like a rose, can't stand too much beauty : must go indoors, must lie down. . . . I'm devoted to you, but where is your bedroom ?

X

When I came down to breakfast next morning, I found that there was another guest who had arrived at the little inn late the previous night when I was fast asleep. He was a young man of about my own age and had come up to Cluanie for the fishing. I was not in a very conversational mood at breakfast, but afterwards, when I had

refreshed myself with some strong coffee and deep draughts of mountain air, I began to talk to him.

He was getting his fishing tackle together in the porch with that patient persistence which all true fishermen acquire from a long acquaintance with twisting catgut and maddeningly ubiquitous hooks. I asked him whether he was going fishing in the loch. He said that he was not : he was keeping the loch for the morrow, when his friend was coming up from Edinburgh to join him.

" To-day," said he, " I'm going away over yon hills down to the Loch Quoich side to do some burn fishing."

" You'll not get much to-day ? " I half asked him. " The sun's too bright and there's not much water about."

" Och, don't ye mind that, friend," he replied, " it'll rain fine before the day's out, and the trout in this part of the world are no so very particular that they'll spue out some tasty red scoured worms that I've kept for them."

I love burn fishing much better than loch fishing, and the youth's easy confidence about catching trout on the Loch Quoich side of the hills so allured me that I asked him if he'd mind my coming with him.

" Och, no. You come along. I'd like fine to have some company," he genially replied.

And so, when I had begged some sandwiches from Mrs. MacDonald, I set out with my companion to go down Glen Shiel until we saw a suitable place for scaling the range on the left side of us. It was a warm, rather muggy day, and well before we had begun to ascend the mountain side I was very glad that I had left my thick red heather coat behind at Cluanie and was arrayed only in my trousers and my khaki shirt.

We had not been able to take a map with us, for the only map at Cluanie was too large to carry conveniently. We had, however, studied it well before we started ; for my friend did not know the part of the country towards which we were making, and it is one of my boasts that I can hold the sight of a map down to its smallest details for hours in my mind's eye. It was a delight to see this

mental picture taking actual steps as we climbed up the rather painfully steep ascent. The whole length of the curving valley was soon before us, and then, with a start of pleasure, I saw the first glimmerings of that long arm of the Atlantic called Loch Duich. To the East, the great moor towards Fort Augustus began to stretch itself out, and the distant and dull peaks of the Cairngorms to show against the sky. I then for the next half-hour held my eye on the ground before me and would not allow myself to look around, for I wished to enjoy in one quick realization the view which I knew to await us on the Westward side.

The ridge we were ascending began to sharpen until it seemed that we were almost advancing with one leg on one side and one on the other, as boys climb straddled along the top of a house roof. The rock began to show through the heather and ling, and far below in the valleys on either side the burns which were tumbling towards the main stream of Glen Shiel seemed like streaks of distant silver. The ridge came to an end and we attained the last hundred feet of the range, which was an easy slope of springy turf. The opposite side fell very abruptly ; and so, before tackling the descent, we paused and took a look round at the view. We could now see far out beyond the end of Loch Duich, and the real Atlantic was for miles visible breaking quietly on the rocky coast, full of long lochs and promontories. Skye lay to the north-west of us, and against the blue of that mysterious quarter the points of the Coolin Hills showed in an even sharper and clearer blue. Now they were clearly visible : now we were hardly able to detect them from their background. They had a straightness, a steepness, a fantastic queerness of shape, and, lying far out in the sea, they moved the heart to an almost painful emotion. To the immediate west we could see some of the Inner Hebrides becalmed in their magic sea, while to the South there lay the sweep of the great red valley which, with Loch Quoich just showing at the end of it, was our objective.

The descent was at first rather alarming. There was a quantity of loose rubble, some of it large enough to do damage when we disturbed it, to send it plunging and rattling down before us. Our feet were continually slipping from under us and scattering a cloud of stones : so we had to keep on a level for fear that he who lagged behind should precipitate on to the more energetic the results of his falls. I was glad that I had the fishing-basket on my back and had not charge of the rod. I would, I felt sure, have broken the rod, and the basket made a very useful buffer state between my back and the stones when I fell. As it was, my elbows and back-side were badly skinned, and before we had left the rabble behind and were out into the easy slope of grass and heather which led down into the valley, I had a most indecent tear in the seat of my trousers. At the time this was welcome to me, for it was a hot day and gruelling work and the gash permitted a cooling breeze to play about my legs.

It was half-past one before we had completely crossed the range and found ourselves in the cup of the red glen which we had seen from the heights. Loch Quoich was now hidden again, and the stream running into it, which from above had seemed so insignificant, turned out to be a substantial Highland burn full of deep brown pools and long rippling runs. Every stone promised a trout's hiding-place behind it, and the smooth surfaces of the pools cried out to be broken by the yellow gleam and splash of a fighting fish. We sat down to have our lunch by the bank of this stream, for we were both a little more tired than we cared to admit by our climb, and my companion was glad to have a rest before he began to fish.

He was not a very loquacious fellow and most of his conversation was restricted to questions to me about London. From talking about London I led the subject on to France and Europe. My companion was of that type which the English find so difficult to understand. He had few words with which to express his emotions,

but those who took the trouble to watch him could notice in him a profound enthusiasm which, when aroused, glowed with a fine but unshowy heat. He listened to my stories, and I could see that his imagination was stirred. He made, I confess, just the kind of audience that I like. Responsive but not shallow, he was the perfect egoist's companion. He was uneducated, in the easy sense of that word, and would have been in the end dull had one been forced to have his companionship for weeks, for he had hardly sufficient powers of observation and expression to keep one lively. But he had the contained emotionalism of his race, so often misunderstood, which always fascinates me.

When he rose to fish (which he rather unorthodoxly did downstream), I accompanied him for a few hundred yards, and was pleased with the skill with which he cast out his line. It was a graceful sight to watch him, well-concealed behind a boulder or a tree, send out the worm—it was too bright for the fly—with a delicate twitch of the wrist just strong enough to drop it noiselessly on the other side of an eddy, or stone, yet not too violently to jerk off the highly-flavoured bit of meat—for that is all these overscoured worms are—from the hidden hook. Fishing down stream on one of these bigger tributaries of the lochs is not, however, the kind of thing that pleases me very much. I prefer the burn fishing to which I had grown accustomed as a boy : burn fishing, in which you mount by a steeply falling stream not much wider than eight feet, full of waterfalls and unexpected pools, streams fringed with no vegetation save the heather and an occasional rowan tree, and in which the trout run from a quarter to half a pound. The little trout look very pretty when you have them out of the water, and they dance and show their spotted sides on the heather before you put them in your basket to lose their colours in the dull stiffness of death. That is the kind of fishing I like best ; so I was soon weary of walking with my friend, and, telling him that I would wait for him on his return journey

up the stream, I sat down beneath a rowan tree and prepared to enjoy a rest.

This was an extremely beautiful valley. Whether it was that the heather was here more advanced than elsewhere, and that rowan was more plentiful and fruitful, or that there was some mysterious indefinable cause which I do not know of, but certainly the valley glowed with a most royal deep red colour. It was broad, deep, spacious : the curves of it were lovely, and its sides soared up to a great height on either side, the peaks of it showing distant against the blue. I could distinguish now and again on the flank which faced me the movements of a flock of red deer ; they were almost the colour of their background, and they so easily came into and then eluded the range of the eye that it was with difficulty that one persuaded oneself that they were real.

My exertions had only now enabled me to throw off the last of the fumes of the previous night's wine, and the consequent rather pleasing desire for sleep fell upon me. The wind was soft, the stream melodious, the great coloured valley was my cradle, and in a few minutes I had sunk off into a deep and delicious slumber.

I awoke feeling cold and uncomfortable. At first, I thought that I must have slept until the evening was beginning to fall, and then I noticed that the darkness was due to the clouds which had gathered from the north and were passing in deep masses high overhead. My companion had returned and was fishing the stream about a hundred yards above me. I got up stiffly and walked down to join him.

" What time is it ? "

" Just on half-past eight."

" Good God ! I must have slept nearly six hours. Had any luck ? "

" Oh, a few, now that these clouds have come over and the evening rise is on, but they are all wee ones. It wasn't worth the climb. Let's pack up."

" Right you are, my boy ; but have a look at the range we crossed."

He looked up as I directed and gave a long whistle of dismay. The wind, which was rising every minute, had cast a mass of mist and cloud about even the lowest peaks and it would have been madness to have attempted to go back by the same way that we had come.

" Will it blow over, d'you think ? " I asked him.

" Not it," he answered. " The wind's from the north. This has set in for the night," and, as he spoke, the first cold drops of small fine rain began to sweep down the glen on our left.

We were standing at the junction of three valleys, for we had crossed the range from Glen Shiel at a spot where another valley went off at right angles. Casting my mind back to what I remembered of the map we had studied at Cluanie, I remembered that if we pursued the valley which ran parallel to Glen Shiel under the lee of the range we had crossed, we would get to a gap in the mountains where we could cross over and join the road from Invergarry. I told my companion about this ; and as soon as he consented, we set off on this north-easterly direction up a long and desolate glen. I was annoyed at the prospect of the rather long walk before us, but welcomed the exercise that it would give me to throw off my sluggishness, and consoled myself with thoughts of the food and baths that the MacDonalds would have for us when we returned.

We set off on the narrow stony path, which ran up the glen, one behind the other, for it was not wide enough to take us both abreast. The thin, piercing rain grew colder as the evening progressed and many times I regretted the coat that I had left at Cluanie. We had gone steadily for two hours eastwards before the range on our left showed any sign of declining ; and what with the advancing twilight, and the thickening mist, we became more and more anxious to cross into the valley that held our road. At last we decided that a suitable point had been reached and, my companion leading, we turned

sharp left up the hillside as fast as we could, so as to cross before the light quite failed us. It was a slippery and stony ascent ; the foothold was uncertain ; and what with jumping from rock to rock, and slipping down the little holes and gullies concealed by the heather, we were both exhausted by the time we had reached the top of the range. Even when we had attained this hardly-striven-for goal we had little comfort ; for though the hill was not very high, and did not take us more than three-quarters of an hour to climb at full stretch, it was very steep and all the time was sheltering us from the north wind and rain. When, however, we suddenly topped the last ridge and faced the north, we received the whole force of this sudden tempest in our face. We had been only too much aware of the gathering storm as we had walked along the bottom of the valley. The dark clouds had oppressed us, the rain wetted us, and the wind, high above us, had made us uneasy with mournful noises. But until we exposed ourselves to its full malignity on the crest of the ridge, we had not realized what we were in for.

" Come in here, I've got four sandwiches left," said my companion, as he led the way behind the deep shelter of a rock ; and I followed him into the convenient hollow to eat the remainder of the food and prepare myself for what I knew was going to be a long and struggling walk.

" Now, laddie, are you quite certain that we'll strike the road if we hold down this glen ? " my friend asked me as soon as we were settled down.

" Absolutely certain," I replied, for I could see as clearly as if it were before me the way the map showed this ridge which we had mounted and the road skirting its northern flank a long way round in a weary circle.

" It's a long way on," I added, " but if we keep north-east down this sloping glen, we must—we can't help coming to the road."

" Is there a burn we'll have to cross ? " he asked.

" Yes, but I noticed it on my walk from Invergarry ;

it's not very wide, and doesn't run deep ; we're certain to be able to cross it. Even if we couldn't, all we would have to do is to hold on east up the glen until we struck the road and that will lead us to the bridge."

" Come on then, Moray," he said, rather unexpectedly, addressing me by my Christian name, " let's start off now and keep close. We don't want to get separated."

The northern slope of the ridge we had just scaled was quite different from the southern. It was rough and uneven enough, but it sloped down in a long easy descent towards the valley, which in this light was too distant for us to see.

It was clear, I felt, that I was going to have a very exhausting evening ; this cold was distressing. I was continually losing my footing on the rocky ground, and I calculated that we must be quite eight or nine miles from home. However, with trite reflections about all this sort of thing being rather fun when it's all over, and with renewed pleasure in thought of the refreshment that awaited me when I got back to Cluanie, I joined my companion in the descent into the valley.

XI

The night now began to fall in dead earnest, the wind increased, and, to my extreme discomfort, I noticed that the rain contained flakes of that uncomfortable mixture of snow and water. Even in summer on these heights in Ross-shire one is never quite free from the chance of a fall of snow. We stumbled on together, occasionally shouting and talking to keep our spirits up, and in an hour's time we reached the main stream of the valley. To our delight it proved easily fordable—we were far too wet and cold already to mind the wading—and, instead of continuing eastwards to where we knew the road curled round and over the bridge, we decided to make a short cut and carry on north to meet it a little farther up. This

turned out to be a most disheartening adventure. The mist and darkness were already far too thick around us or we would not have attempted it, for we would have seen what lay before us.

After crossing the stream we at once began to ascend ; at no time could we see more than a hundred yards ahead of us ; and so we had gone on for some considerable time before we understood that, far from crossing a simple bit of moorland lying between us and the road, we were scaling the side of a mountain. Neither of us dared to admit that we were beaten. We toiled on and on and up until, as the wisp of mist for one solitary moment separated itself from the main bulk of cloud, the last gleam of an ashen-grey twilight showed us to be standing under the lee of an immense crag, quite unscalable. Had I been alone, I would have burst into tears with the disappointment ; as it was, we both turned and without any words to each other began the disgusting labour of retracing the course which we had taken in such hope.

Down we went, careless now of twisting ankles and bruised elbows ; all we wanted to do was to gain the valley again and continue our course to the east, where we knew the road lay. " Fools, fools ! " I kept murmuring to myself like some refrain, a habit of mine when I am tired and angry. " Why did we try that short cut ? "

The descent took much less time than any other piece of walking we had done that day—we were getting anxious. When one is in a frightened hurry, one becomes surprisingly agile and goat-like on one's feet. I had been tired before, but now I began to get something of the second wind of my energy back again, and a strange lightness seemed to carry me easily forward over the most difficult boulders and gullies.

At last we reached the stream again, and this time, on its northern side, began to make our painful way up the glen. This was an extraordinarily foolish mistake for two Scotsmen to make. Any fool could have told us to keep to the high land, for the hills were full of the mournful

roar of swollen streams. Every trickle was now, after five hours' drenching rain, a tempestuous cascade, and ordinary streams were, in this easily excitable country, great sluices of yellow foaming spate. All had as their end, all were tributary to the main stream of the valley. And so, as any fool could have told us, we had to cross every stream that came from the northern side at its widest and deepest point, that is, just before it joined the central stream.

I now began to wonder whether I should have the strength to reach the road ; my second wind of energy proved to be a very transitory and weak thing. It had soon ebbed out of my stumbling, gasping body, and left me a prey to the shrieking winds and the coldest cold that I have ever endured. It was quite different from all other feelings of cold that I have felt. Others were superficial ; this had quite literally seized me by the heart, and I could feel that my blood had not the vigour to combat it. My bones were like sticks of ice and my bowels had no more warmth in them than had my skin.

Every few hundred feet we had to cross a torrent that was on its way to join the main stream beside which we were walking. We knew our mistake now, but had not the heart to set it right by climbing the flank of that abominable hill again. All that we could do was to keep going on and on in one direction. We were quite careless of the way we crossed these streams, for every stitch of clothing we had on us was dripping (and you must remember that all I had was a shirt, a pair of flannel trousers, and my boots and socks) ; and we would, without any thought, walk straight into them, sometimes falling flat down in the water, sometimes stepping into holes that almost submerged us. All that we had the energy to do was to go on and on. The ground in between the streams was almost as bad. Thinking on it afterwards, I was glad that it was soft, for I am sure we would have sprained our ankles or broken our legs had it been stony, but at the time this softness was maddening.

Now swampy, now covered with masses of heather, it was perpetually rising and falling ; and could anyone have seen us, I think we would have made at the same time one of the most pitiful and the most comical sights imaginable. We had long ceased to cry out or make any sign when we fell ; we just scrambled up on to our feet and dragged ourselves on. As we fell, we fell completely, quite flat down on our faces in the soft swamp or vegetation ; and this happened on an average once every fifty yards. We moved like drunken men, or like children learning to walk on the counterpane of an immense bed. Sometimes one of us would be down three times in twenty yards ; sometimes we would manage three hundred yards without a fall; but it was chance, not our circumspection, that would allow this. We were now quite careless of how we walked; all that we contrived to do was to keep moving on by the side of the now deepening and curving stream, splashing, falling, crawling rather than wading through its innumerable tributaries.

All this time I kept on trying to force my numbed brain to remember exactly the appearance of the map. I could see the shape of the valley as the map had drawn it, and I remembered that the stream was shown as winding in it just before it got to the bridge where the road ran over it. I could not, however, just remember the scale, or how long the valley was. I felt rather than knew that we must be near the road ; we had clearly covered some miles of the valley and had been on the move for hours. The road simply *could not* be more than half a mile ahead of us now. The road began to assume in my mind a greater importance than that of the inn, the shelter, the food and wine. Those were too distant : they were unimaginable. The thing that we must reach, must see and feel before us is that road. The road would not be any more kind to us than this swamp. It would, indeed, be more uncomfortable to fall on the road than here ; and the wind and rain would be just as cold there. It was just that the road was our immediate objective ; it was the thing on

which we had pinned our hopes ; to reach it would be to have achieved something ; it would be a proof that we were not just walking in a delirium. I didn't want to do anything with the road. I didn't know whether I could walk to Cluanie on the road, but somehow I felt that I could be content with the road. I could lie down and sleep on it, happy in the knowledge that I had got to it.

Then I began to notice a thing which I at first could not or would not believe, but which eventually became so obvious that hope died within me and all my mind and body went alive again with fear. The stream on our right had for some time ceased to make any running sound, it had grown deep and slow, like an English river, and looked most unnatural in these moorland surroundings. I at last saw that not only had it ceased to make a noise, but it had stopped flowing altogether. We were no longer walking beside a stream, but upon the shores of a loch. We stopped and strained to look through the rain and darkness across the water. We could see no other side, and yet we could see far enough to understand that this was no stream or river. It was a great broad lake or long tarn lying stretched out upon what we now began to perceive was no valley but a great moorland desert all around. For the shelter of the hills was withdrawn from us, the wind, the streaming clouds, the rain beat upon us now with nothing to protect us. And when the clouds in their hurry occasionally separated above our heads and let through enough weak light from the moon to show us our surroundings, all we could see was a waste of water on one side and of moor on the other. There had been no loch marked on the map, in the place where I had supposed we were, and there had been mountains on either side. We were lost. The road was now for ever denied us.

It was now obvious to me that I should probably die before I could drag myself to any shelter. For the last hour or so, my mind had ever so distantly toyed with the idea that the exposure might be too much for me before

Cluanie ; but the road had become such an obsession, it was so immediately desirable that the wish for it had pushed fear out of my mind. Now, when in a few seconds the hope of gaining the road was withdrawn from me, the realziation of Death, accompanied by my extravagant fear of it, rushed in and occupied every nook and cranny of my mind. Through the confusion of the noise in my ear and the deadness of my numbed body and brain, there shot like an electric current the terror of annihilation. I was in an instant revivified, not into action, but into sensation. There was nothing to do save to walk on, and that seemed hopeless ; the chances were hundreds to one that we would not come to any shelter before we collapsed. Once off the road in this most desolate part of Scotland, I knew that one might walk for forty miles through valleys and over swamps, passing between houses and small villages a few miles on either side, but never seeing them. A moment before exhaustion and cold seemed to have robbed me of all power of consecutive thought. A vague sleepiness had obscured the process of my mind. Now, in a lightning flash of fear, I knew and clearly understood everything.

It would be tedious to go on describing the pain and fear of the next two hours. I had often before had to face for about five seconds the possibility of Death, as, for instance, when a motor accident seemed inevitable ; but never before and never again, I hope, shall I have to endure the close prospect of that abominable fact for two hours on end. I had been in the habit of trying to comfort myself when I had been more than usually worried by Death, by telling myself that when it came actually to dying, when one was really up against it, one would be given hope or faith or some triumphant emotion which would conquer terror. Whether this is not true, or whether hope was withheld from me because I was destined not to die on this occasion, I do not know ; but certainly, never in my life has my foolish terror more violently seized and tormented me than during these two hours,

We kept straight on in the direction we had been taking, and as the shore of the loch seemed quite straight we kept it on our right the whole time. We walked now, not so much with the hope of getting anywhere, but merely because we knew that if we didn't move we should fall asleep and die of cold and exposure. Sometimes we came to large boulders or a dip in the heather which gave a meagre little shelter and for about a hundred seconds my companion (who was the more vigorous and masterful of us) would allow me to stop. We would draw close during these pauses and put our arms round each other, so that we got an illusion of warmth from each other's bodies. Always a great longing for sleep came over me when we stopped like this, a longing which in no way took away from fear, but merely seemed to make it more uneasy and unconquerable, as in a nightmare. And when the strength and determination of my companion jerked me out of these half-slumbers, I would awake only to an equally uneasy realization of fact.

There is very little more of our walk that I can remember. Once I thought that we had stumbled upon the Devil, for right before us there rose a great figure not ten yards away. It plunged into the loch with an appalling splash and started to swim to the other side with its horns proudly raised above the water—we had disturbed a great red stag by the water side. Once I pretended to sprain my ankle so that I might force my companion to rest a little. He saw through my lie and shook me so hard that I was crying before he would stop and was convinced that I was awake enough to go on. These two incidents, and the first sight of a dreary grey dawn beginning ever so faintly to influence the weeping night, are the only things I can remember until my companion suddenly broke into what seemed to me a despairing maniacal run, leaving me to sink back into a dip in the heather where I stretched out, longing for nothing save sleep which I lyingly told myself would bring me strength.

I was being shaken again. Two people were pulling me on to my feet. They were making me walk, at least, I suppose it was walking. It seemed to me that I just skimmed, like a mote of dust, over the surface of the ground. We were going through a door, and there were red lights about, and a woman's face was so close to me that I thought it was going to sink right into my brain, so I put out my hand to push it away, but it was already yards away from me. And then slowly (though with another part of my mind, I knew it only took about ten seconds) things swam back into focus. I was standing in a room. The main room of a croft. The lamps were lit. An old shepherd was holding my arm and half-tearing, half-peeling my clothes off me, while a woman was bending over the fireplace turning back the smouldering peat hags, so that the glowing sides were turned out to face the room. I tried to move towards the fire and when the shepherd held me back I remember that I began to speak in a stupid, loose, unintelligible kind of way, keeping on struggling to get nearer the fire.

The woman came up to me, and with the sighing, infinitely comfortable voice of the North, told me that I must not get near the fire.

" You are too colt. You may not come to the fire for a wee pit. You will be purnt. Na, na, you must be slow ; it is not goot for you ; it is not goot for you."

She kept on saying these last words over and over again, less for their meaning than for their soothing repetition, while she helped her husband to take off my clothes. When I was stripped she dried me with a rough piece of cloth, and then very slowly allowed me to come nearer to the glow.

The pain of being warmed, ever so gently as these wise people would allow me, then gripped me, and I felt that slow relaxation of the muscles, half-frozen, numbed with exhaustion, which they had feared to let me endure too strongly at first. The woman then began to rub my limbs, to massage me with a mixture of warm water and

whisky. Standing before her naked as a child, with her rough hands all over me, with the pain of the influencing heat and the smell of the spirit in my brain, I could not help thinking of the absurd story of the refined English traveller who, having sprained his ankle on the moors, was having his foot and ankle washed in whisky by the proprietor of his hotel. He commented on the lavish way the whisky was being used and begged the proprietor not to waste it. " Inteed, inteed, it is no waste whateffer," replied the Highlandman, " the shentlemen do often hurt their feet and it gives a peautiful flavour to the whisky." I wondered whether my body would give a beautiful flavour to this whisky, and I started laughing in a silly kind of a way.

They put me to bed somewhere in the croft. It was comfortable, but I was too tired to sleep easily, and until five o'clock in the afternoon I lay on the border line of a feverish slumber. At five she made me sit up and drink a great tumbler of hot milk, whereon I sweated in streams and then fell peacefully into a deep sleep until the next morning. My friend who had much more strength than I had left the croft on the afternoon of the day we reached it and was shown the way back to Cluanie. So, as soon as I was ready to go back, the MacDonalds very kindly sent a car down to the point on the road nearest to the croft. I rode over on a pony with my host to meet it and could have cried with joy when I saw MacDonald's cheerful face again at the wheel. Instead, I told over and over again the story of our adventures and then told them once more to Mrs. MacDonald when I got back to Cluanie. . . I had a magnificent dinner that night.

XII

After I had rested and exercised myself sufficiently at Cluanie to remove the stiffness from my legs, I set off on a clear West Highland morning down the Glen towards

Loch Duich and the sea. I thought as I passed between these huge green hills, more huge and green as I got nearer to the sea, of the strange pair that came down this glen a hundred and sixty years ago—Johnson straddling across his sturdy little pony ; Boswell walking by its side eager to catch every word the master said about this wilderness ; Johnson's terrific outburst at Glenelg ; Boswell's aggrieved sulkiness and the tail of ragged ghillies swinging along behind them, their high whinnying Gaelic contrasting with Johnson's weighty pronouncements, that Gaelic which Johnson so deliciously described (when he was complaining about the lack of literature in Erse) as having " merely floated indeterminately in the breath of the people." I have always been irritated by the stupid way my countrymen have chosen to take offence at Johnson's *Journey to the Western Isles*. That he did not pour out the aimless sentimentalities of a nineteenth-century Scotophil was not only inevitable when one considers Johnson's period and character, but a thing for which every Scot should be grateful. More; he should be grateful that anyone so magnificent as Johnson should have considered it worth while to venture into a country which was then more remote and dangerous than the Balkans are to-day, and should have given us so sympathetic and amusing a book. Hypersensitive about the slightest criticism, inflamed by the tedious romanticism of the nineteenth century, there is a certain kind of Scotsman whose aggressive and ugly patriotism has made him rightly to be detested throughout the world. His view of Johnson's book has been almost universally accepted by the Scots people who have not, as a rule, troubled to read it, and so his influence has done harm at home as well as abroad.

The winding road down to Loch Duich runs between mountains that draw closer together and become steeper and higher as one travels westward. They have no heather on them but are coloured a dark green and grey. The peaks as they hang over one, sometimes in the clouds, sometimes against the pale blue Northern sky, look down

in a rather sinister way, and not until one is a few hundred yards away from it can one see the beginning of Loch Duich which (a curving arm of the Atlantic) has insinuated itself amongst these grim heights.

Long before I came in sight of it I could smell that peculiar freshness of the Western sea, and pressed forward impatiently expecting to see it at every corner. There is a little inland loch lying beside the road some way before Duich which, when I came upon it suddenly, did for the moment deceive me, but when I saw, not that rusty brown seaweed of the sea loch, but merely the standing green flags of fresh water, I understood that it could not be what I was looking for and, intoxicated by the strengthening tang in my nostrils, passed rather contemptuously this pretty little loch with the mountains reflected in it and the wild fowl circling round it.

The sense of smell more than any other can quickly revive old memories. A German passes you in the street smoking one of those awful green cigars, one whiff and you have before you again a forgotten incident in a railway carriage full of cropped and jabbering Prussian students when you endured that hideous journey from Hamburg to Berlin. You open an old book that you have never read before and as you turn the stiff crackling pages you see your nursery, the fat nurse, the fireguard and your sisters with whom you have unsuccessfully just finished a quarrel. You raise the volume near to your face to see more clearly a faded bit of print, the musty smell of the decaying pages then becomes so obvious that you understand that you had all along been faintly aware of it and that it is the same as that of an old book you had as a child. In this way the smell of the Atlantic evoked things in my mind that I had long thought dead ; and when at last I turned the corner by a pleasant little white house and saw the sea after ten miles of protracted expectation, I ran down to its edge and, stumbling over the stones and rotting weed, dipped my arms in it up to the elbows to make sure in every sense that it was no mirage.

The West at last ! All the snob paragraphs in all the smart papers in the world during the " Scottish Season " could not destroy what this meant ; it was too cleansing and too large. They—those about whom the paragraphs are written—might bring their yachts into these lochs and rent these hills to shoot over, but this was unconquerable. They could never really like the essential secret of this, it was too mysterious, too withdrawn and too frequently misty and uncomfortable for them, and so they would never want to spoil it. No Gleneagles could ever be built here. The multifarious noises of no dinner dance would ever insult these valleys. That is what I thought at the time as I half crouched, half knelt in the seaweed by the water's edge. But I'm not so sure now. What the rich brewers in the nineteenth century failed to do the more numerous grocers of the twentieth may accomplish with their cheap cars and their portable bungalows. And somehow I see that it would be foolish to object—as long as you don't call it progress.

When I had had enough of the sea I came back again and sat down by the roadside to eat my lunch which I had taken with me from Cluanie. For the moment I was uncertain whether to go north or south. I eventually decided on the south, for I did not want to get any more mixed up with the main road to Skye, and the south, the immediate south, held the remote districts of Morar and Moidart, which I had heard about as being so mysteriously cut off from the rest of Scotland. I, therefore, when I had rested, took the road or path up to the left, which climbs with such convolutions up the hills to the south-west of Loch Duich. It was a trying enough surface for the feet, and I was amused to remember that it was on this very road that Johnson could hardly cling to his pony, and so violently lost his temper with Boswell on account of his fear—one of the few incidents in which Boswell succeeds in showing up Johnson badly. The story has a ring of truth in it and is as convincing as the one of Boswell's drunkenness at Skye later on.

When I had toiled to the summit I was rewarded, for once again I saw the peaks of the "flying Island" cold and blue to the West, while behind and below me the loch lay undisturbed as a sheet of glass, and gave back again the lovely image of its circumstanding hills.

I had noticed that about half a mile ahead of me there was a pony and a cart being led up the road. I could not in my occasional glimpses of it in the turns of the road see much of the people who were with it—I could only catch a gleam now and again of flaming red hair. However, when I had got to the top, and after having looked at the view, turned to go down the other side, I found that this party which I had been following had also rested and that I had caught it up. It was a family of Highland gypsies, the father and mother and two little children of about six and four years old. There was also with them a youth of sixteen or seventeen whom I supposed to be not of the family, for he had black hair while that of all the others was red as carrots and tumbled in confusion over their shoulders. I came up to where they were sitting beside the road and gave the father some cigarettes and started to talk to him. He had not much English, and I less Gaelic, but between us, and with the aid of his extravagant mannerisms we understood each other. The red-headed man and woman had the easy wheedling ways of their kind and even when they found out that they could sell me nothing they continued to talk and make gestures in a friendly way ; even the children were not shy of me. But the youth, who was dark Celtic and looked like a wild cat, did nothing but crouch at a distance, half sitting, half on his heels, his hands dangling over his bent knees and his eyes never off my face.

He gave me the uneasy feeling that the moment I turned my back on him his teeth would be in my neck. I could not believe that any human being so wild could still be at large in the British Isles. They told me afterwards that he was a half-brother of the woman's, but

what they meant by half-brother was not clear, and he was possibly no real relation whatever.

The Highland gypsy is not strictly speaking, a gypsy at all. He is not a foreigner, but merely comes of a local vagabond stock. I think a good many of these families were set on the roads at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries by the evictions, and have with the natural aptitude of such a hardy race for the open air, taken to the road, on which they have lived ever since. The roots of some may lie farther back, for I believe that in spite of the settled clan system there were a number of privileged traders and wanderers who passed all over the Highlands quite easily from the domain of one clan to that of another. Many of them are called MacPhee, which clan has always had the name of being gypsies. Also it is possible that some of them may be the remains of a landless clan like the Macgregors, which over two hundred years ago was forced to take to wandering in the hills. Nowadays they do not move much in the winter but return in November to Inverness or Fort William, where they live on their summer proceeds, upon odd jobs, and continue to make the pots and pans which they hawk about the country in the summer. Amongst the static Highlanders they are usually known as tinkers, but that word is used in the way that gypsies would be used in England. The curious thing about them is that they nearly all have red hair, a thing uncommon in the average Highlander, which rather supports the outlaw clan theory as in a few clans there is, or was, quite a sprinkling of red hair, which marked them out from the other Highlanders. These tinkers are at the present day noted for their honesty (in spite of their appearance) and their ability to swear vividly in Gaelic. I do not think they have any special tongue like Romany, but their Gaelic is very fluent and energetic, and they usually have only a little English.

The man eventually made one more attempt to sell me a large saucepan, but I told him that I did not need

anything. I gave his children bits of chocolate, and when I held out some tobacco to the dark youth he looked at it for some time and then, with a motion like a frightened, hungry bird pecking at something in one's hand, he took it from me quickly and put it in his pocket. I then asked the man if I could walk with his family on to where they were going and I would give him a few pennies if he would teach me more Gaelic words. I don't know what he thought I was—a little mad, I suppose—for my voice would not tell his scantily Englished ear much about me. I saw him looking suspiciously at my rucksack, so I opened it for him and showed him that I only had my simple personal things and was not peddling the roads. He then agreed, and when the children had been thrown into the pony-cart with almost incredible roughness—which they did not mind in the least—we all set out down the path into the green valley before us, I helping at awkward corners and learning at each fresh difficulty a new Gaelic oath. The man was perpetually talking to me, and I only understood a quarter of what he said ; the woman, in a high whine, was scolding the children who chattered on regardless ; the tin goods rolled, clattered and clanked in our hands and in the cart. And at the tail of this odd and noisy procession the dark youth walked as silent as a half-tamed animal.

The country which we now were descending into was full of green grass. There were trees and, now and again, a farm. Being sheltered by the hills and open to the south, it was more of a fruitful spot than I had seen since Balquidder. At the houses and farms we always made an attempt to sell our goods, and here I would remain respectfully in the background, for I was sensitive about the kindness of these people allowing me to come along with them and did not want to interfere with their business in any way. They were usually received in a friendly way, and after bargaining on one side and eloquent whining on the other something was usually bought. Halfway down the road we met an Englishman and his wife,

walking over to Loch Duich. My companions, of course, tried to sell them something and, of course, failed, for there was nothing which an English "lady" far from home could possibly want in their absurd stock of articles. However, I was able to plead in such eloquent English for our party, that partly out of astonishment, partly to get rid of me and my embarrassing companions, they gave me a florin, which I handed over to the woman who, it appeared, kept the bank of the family.

Stopping frequently like this we made very slow progress, and we had not covered many miles when the evening began to come on. There was a little mist in the west and there were clouds overhead which brought on the twilight sooner than we expected. So, when we found a place where we could get a little milk, the woman and the children moved off to a small house to beg or buy some, and I asked the man to come with me to an astonishing-looking house, which he told me was an hotel. My foolish idea was that there would be a kind of side bar, a lowly tap-room where we would be able to get a drink. In this I displayed my lack of knowledge of this kind of hotel and my lack of knowledge of this gypsy kind, who seldom drink, but who would not have liked to hurt my feelings by refusing.

The hotel was a Victorian-Gothic monster. There were about two or three built over Scotland during the Victorian Highland boom after Balmoral, but I believe this is the only one of its kind in all the West Highlands. Architecturally, it is much worse even than St. Pancras Hotel, and only by a fortunate piece of miscalculation on the part of the architect is it almost invisible until one is right on to it. I began to realize my mistake when, after having forced our way through a pretentious shrubbery, we found ourselves lost under a confusion of pointed arches, buttresses and Gothic windows. I thought it would be ignominious for me to retreat now, so I told my companion to wait for me, and started wandering round one of the most shapeless buildings I have ever seen,

Suddenly, a head far above me shot out of a pointed window, and a high masculine voice said, "Who iss there?"

"Is this the Y—— hotel?" I asked.

"Yess, inteed, but who iss there?"

"I want a drink," I shouted back, "for my friend and myself." (It was not ten o'clock yet.)

There was a long pause, and eventually a light showed through the glass of a door like the west entrance to a cathedral, and a very cautious long Highland head, with drooping moustaches attached to it, looked out.

"Who iss there whateffer?" it repeated.

"Can you give me a drink?" I answered. I was conscious that the door was opened a little more so that the light should shine upon me, and after a long inspection I was, for some reason, considered respectable enough, and I was cautiously admitted. I understood, of course, that after all this palaver, my friend would not stand a chance of getting in, so I decided that I would buy some whisky for him and me and take it out to him in my flask.

"I'm so sorry to disturb you, sir, but I didn't know that there wasn't a bar here or I wouldn't have dragged you down," I said to the keeper of the door.

"That's all right, friend," replied the odd-looking Celt who was drinking in every inch of me as he looked at me, and was evidently reassured.

"But may I go out and ask my friend to wait a minute?" I said.

To my surprise he assented, and I went out into the drive and looked all round for my friend. To my great chagrin he had vanished into the twilight. I then understood my want of delicacy in asking him into this place for a drink. Should I pursue him and apologize? Rain was now coming in from the west with the mist. Apart from the difficulty of finding this creature of the hills on an evening like this, a drink in an hotel was worth six apologies in the rain, so I turned back sadly and entered once again the "soaring arch" of the hotel.

My host was waiting for me when I got into the hall.

He was in shirt-sleeves, plus fours, and carpet slippers, as I looked at him now for the second time, I could hardly believe my eyes, so long were his moustaches and so drooping. He looked like a Celtic Rip Van Winkle.

"Have you a little food for me and anywhere I can sleep?" I asked him, for, what with my tiredness and the depression of losing my friend, I had no energy to go out and look for a place to sleep in a cottage or a farm. He nodded and led me through long passages into an enormous room that could have easily held two ordinary college chapels at Oxford, and was as big as the average London church. It was composed of a confusion of pointed arches and contained strings and strings of green baize-covered collapsible tables.

"You will be wanting some whisky, eh?"

I agreed, and so he shuffled out of the room, leaving me standing in the middle of it, my only illumination a single candle which cast a pool of light around my immediate circumstances, but left the remoter parts of the room in darkness. He brought me a stiff glass of fine whisky and some peat-stained water, and then went out again to get me some food. As I thought he would be some time over this, I felt at liberty to explore, and began to wander about the Gothic gloom, my candle in one hand and my whisky in the other.

This was like having dinner in the Castle of Otranto, I reflected, but I giggled to think how ineffective and unalarming all this absurdity was. It was only frightening when one thought how pathetically this whole pastiche had failed to come off. It only alarmed as a gigantic failure.

I drank the whisky at a gulp, and holding the candle high above my head, walked round the edges of the walls, exploring each cranny and useless "recess." There were photographs high up on the walls of old shooting and fishing parties, which had stayed at this hotel back in the 'sixties; they were not covered with dust as one might have expected (the place was evidently well preserved) but

that they still remained on the walls was sufficiently remarkable. The room, looked at by the light of a flickering and uncertain candle, was one of the most perfect mausoleums of Scottish fashionable Victorianism that one could wish for.

I had been looking at a picture at the end of the room furthest from the door when I became aware that the gloom around me had faintly lightened, and I turned to see my host, a lamp in one hand and a huge plate of ham in the other, looking rather suspiciously at me. I came forward, making some remark about having lost myself in his palatial dining-room, so as to reassure him. He then went to one of the green baize tables and laid down my plate with something between a grunt and a sigh.

I have seldom seen such generosity in ham. If I was feeding in a baronial hall I was certainly being served with a baronial portion. I must have eaten nearly half a pig that evening.

When I had finished, my host showed me up a staircase (the kind that is described as a " mawble staircase " in the well-known story) and into an octagonal bedroom which reminded me of Strawberry Hill. He finally left me getting into a double feather bed, which was so soft and capacious that it was more of an embrace than a bed. In spite of my giggles, I confess that I left my candle alight for nearly an hour before I felt inclined to blow it out, and when I had done so, I plunged my head deep beneath the sheets to avoid the sight of whiskered and " leg-of-mutton "-sleeved ghosts which I felt must wander somewhere about in these nineteenth-century halls.

XIII

I AWOKE early next morning, and, after a cup of tea, I paid my bill, which was surprisingly small for board and lodging in a cathedral, and set out south-west again. As I said good-bye to the spires and pinnacles of this

monster place, I thought with amusement of a friend of mine who had had a rather heavier bill as a result of trying to spend a night in a cathedral.

My friend, who is otherwise sane, is a preposterous Germanophil, and whenever he enters the sacred territory of the Teuton he has to celebrate the fact by getting very drunk. The last time he did this was at Cologne. He was staying at an ordinary cheap little hotel, built in a sham romantic German style. When trying to find his way back to this place at about three in the morning, inflated with Rhenish and Lager, he came to the noble cathedral, which, as Heine says, so bravely reflects itself from the waves of the Rhine. My friend merely recognizing the Gothic style, and not pausing to reflect whether it was real or sham, at once presumed that it was his hotel. Some instinct led him to the great west door, where he searched vainly over the iron-studded oaken front for the bell which would summon the night-porter. Finding nothing—he was dressed in an ill-fitting black suit and an absurdly incongruous black hat—he stretched himself like a crucified bat across the door and beat and kicked at it, crying out to the rascally proprietor of this low hotel to let him in. In a moment or two the police had swooped down upon him from the square, and the poor amusing little rat was arrested and had to pay a large fine the next day for disturbing the peace.

As soon as I had lost sight of the hotel I left the road and took a direction across the hills which I supposed to be southern. The air was clear after the last night's rain, and after I had been walking for an hour or so and had crossed a small ridge, I saw the Island of Skye lying quite close across a narrow channel. The Coolins still showed blue and far away, but the first hills of the Island looked so distinct in the morning air that it seemed that I could have spat on to them from where I was walking.

The surface began to get more and more difficult, and so, after I had toiled on for about two hours more, I moved a little to the west so as to get down to a long sea loch

which I could see running its insidious course into the hills, and beside which I guessed that I should find a path on at least easier footing. As much time as I could spare from my irritating descent I devoted to wondering at the beauty of the sight in front of me.

I could see down the Sound of Sleat and supposed the abrupt rock which I saw lying far out in the calm sea to be the Island of Eigg. Skye, to the right of me, was black, steep and close, and the hills all round me had that bright red tinge which I had so admired at Glen Quoich. But the loch before me was entrancing. There was no wind stirring its surface, and there were little islands scattered about near its edges with feathery trees growing all over them. I was still so high above the water and yet so near to it (for the sides went down to it steeply) that I could see like a bird or a man in an aeroplane into the depths that were directly below me. All who have seen the Atlantic round the Scottish coast have remarked its extraordinary clarity : even in the harbours they can see from the steamers or from the piers thirty and forty feet down into the water and watch the big fish feeding. But in this undisturbed and undefiled sea-loch, my eye dropping from so great a height must have sunk twice or thrice that depth ; and for over a hundred yards from the shore I was able to trace the pattern of the sea's floor. Farther out, the angle of vision was too obtuse for me to penetrate the surface, and there the water reflected back the almost Italian blue of the sky above me. The red of the mountains, the green of the trees, the unnamed tints of the sea's floor and the blue of its remoter surfaces, all these made an intoxicating confusion of Northern colour which I feared to let go lest I should never see anything like it again in my life.

It seemed to me, then, to contain all, and only the essentials of natural beauty. Everything that was superficial, superfluous, not to the point, was removed and there remained only the crude, splendid, primitive colours from which all visible loveliness is made. In this quality of

discovering only the essential, it strangely reminded me of the only death-bed I have seen. The person who was dying was very old and had known me well as a child. When I was taken in to see her she was as frail and as tired as humanity can be. Physically, everything of comfort, but not of life-necessity, had been exhausted from her by her disease. She was as thin and as pale as a ghost : her skin was no more than the most delicate shell enclosing her life. She had not seen me for years and as I approached her bed I was amazed at my feeling of only then knowing her true nature. Everything was taken from her that was not of her essence. She seemed, also, to perceive only the essential in me. Every one of her words was deliberate, clear, full of meaning. Even in her dying manner of talk she had a sense for words that meant the essential truth. She forgot my name—a name which she had helped to give me—and yet remembered the one essential yet unspoken thing that was our link. The recollection of the sight is one of the few consolations for my exaggerated fear of Death.

When I got down near the edge of the loch I found a fairly decent path which ran along beside it. Happy at having reached the end of my difficult walking, I sat down to rest and eat my hunks of bread and cheese, which I had taken with me from the hotel. I was sitting a little way above the path on a fallen tree-trunk and just behind the spur of a small ridge which made an abrupt corner in the path. I had not been there long when I heard a familiar sound. At first I could only distinguish a well-known clanking and rattling, but as it drew nearer (it was approaching from the right) they became obviously mingled with the high, complaining voices which I knew so well ; and in a minute or two there rounded the corner —the father cursing, the mother scolding, the children quarrelling and the dark youth silent—the gypsy family that I had lost the evening before.

Without the slightest sign of surprise or embarrassment on account of our unusual way of separating the evening

before, the man greeted me with a genial shout. And, as the cart drew up, the children, only for a moment, stopped their jabbering to stare at me over the edge with huge blue eyes. The woman was as exaggeratedly polite as ever, and even the youth drew quite near and seemed less frightened. The idea of me had evidently matured in their minds overnight, and I had clearly been thought better of. There was now only one thing to do, and that was to go on with them ; and so, carrying my last hunk of bread in my hand and biting at it as I went, I walked on with them down the rough and winding little path. We had a long way to go before we could reach the next village or collection of houses, and so I felt that the least I could do was to help with the cart and the mass of assorted tinware which needed continual looking after and adjustment.

When evening was beginning to draw in again we had covered a very fair distance considering our unwieldly baggage and I had much more insinuated myself into the confidence of these people. We had done a little business at a village on our route, and there I had also bought some more bread and potatoes and a little milk, so that the evening meal should be obtained without the begging and hanging about which I was too tired to take much pleasure in. We settled down for that evening meal well away from the last remains of the sea-loch, which we had left behind us at about eight o'clock.

The woman and the dark youth set about making a fire to boil the potatoes ; the pony, for which fodder was rather mysteriously produced, was taken out of the shafts and tethered ; the children were thrown out of the cart with that astonishing roughness which I had noticed before ; and the cart was rolled over on to its side, under the lee of which the man and I lay down and smoked—I ordinary Woodbine cigarettes, he a most foul black tobacco which almost succeeded in poisoning the evening air. That air itself seemed to have turned to blood and gold under the influence of the dying sun and

of the clouds which were slowly rolling up from the west.

I was tired ; the fantastic colours of the impossible sunset bemused me. I was looking forward to my potatoes and bread, and so I temporarily dismissed from my mind the question of where I was going to sleep that night. However, when the meal was over, the point was settled for me. I tried to rise and get my things together for going on, but all their voices in a sudden clamorous conspiracy crowded in on me and told me to stay the night. I knew that these people usually slept all together under one shelter ; and for a moment I funked the prospect of having to wedge myself into the mass of sleeping flesh and sweat which I felt that the family would probably make when it had retired for the night. I accepted the invitation (as soon as I had conquered my fear) for two reasons : firstly, because I was afraid of hurting their feelings and making a scene ; secondly, because I felt that if I had not the courage to sleep with travelling tinkers when offered the chance, I should never be able to talk about my love of squalor again.

I was rewarded for my decision by seeing obvious preparations being made for two shelters instead of one. Was I going to get one all to myself ? But it was not quite as good as that. The canvas stretched over the side of the cart was evidently for the woman and the children ; the other tiny little tent, about six feet by three and three feet high, was to shelter the man, the youth and myself. I put off the moment of going to bed as long as possible and sat by the fire talking to my destined bed-fellows. The firelight and the last gleams of evening which, but for the thick clouds that were rolling up, would have been almost coincident with the first of morning, showed the great eyes of the dark boy fixed on me as we talked of England, of Edinburgh and of travel in Europe. The sheltering gloom, as it always does, drew our small group together into a warmer intimacy. The scolding woman and the bickering children were at last

silent, huddled together under their strip of thick canvas like sleeping animals. We, the masculine we, were left to talk by the last ashes of our fire. I took it as the most friendly move that the boy actually made a remark all on his own.

"I should like fine to come with ye," he said, after I had talked about my return on foot to England. This was the expression of no proposed intention : it was merely a politely sighing wish. He sat there, crouched in the easy attitude of one who has spent all his life out of doors ; he was like the black panther in Kipling's story ; and I could see, even in the darkness of the night that the hair which fell over his forehead was darker still.

At last the unpleasant moment came. We took off our boots, rolled up our coats to make a pillow, and crept into the tiny space for us to lie down in. When we were in, we drew a blanket all over us. Whether we wished to or not, we were by the lack of space compelled to lie huddled together, and I was thankful that, guest though I was, I had not the honoured place in the middle. I fell asleep somehow, but awoke very early in a stifling and stinking fug. I did not want to disturb my companions by getting up ; so, with a little manœuvring, I merely moved my head and shoulders so that I got my face under the flap of the tent, and was able to lie with my mouth out in the open and breathing the freshness of the morning.

As we rose stiffly to cook our breakfast, the clouds and mist had swept in from the sea ; and the light of morning was coloured that dull grey-silver which suggests that never again will the sun shine out fully. I wondered whether it would appear offensive if I were to go down to the nearest stream—there is always one within a quarter of a mile in this part of Scotland—and wash thoroughly after my night's experience. I managed, however, to make some excuse for slipping away, and when I found a fairly capacious pool in one of the brown little streams which were tumbling down the mountain side, I stripped completely and had a short icy and breath-depriving bathe.

I determined, as I was dressing, that nothing would induce me to spend another night like the last, and even contemplated going off without returning to breakfast so as to avoid the embarrassment of refusing another night's shelter. The ignominy of such a retreat, and the probability that I should be seen crossing the burn lower down, made me return to the family group once more. I was well ashamed of my disgust at the night ; it showed me up, I felt, as a superficial and sentimental romanticist. I was prepared, so I told myself, to accept all the fun and the glow of being so Borrovian as to find myself the associate of gypsies, and yet was frightened to go what was almost literally the "whole hog" and endure the roughness, the discomfort and, above all, the odour of the less romantic side of the business.

" Sentimentalist," I said to myself as I walked back, " that's what you are—just as much a sentimentalist as the music-hall singer, or the film actor, who holds out to a lachrymose audience a pair of tiny shoes and sobs out some refrain about :

" Only a baby's shoes,"

and who tells a sad story of how those shoes were made so long ago for a baby who never grew up. Yes, sentimentalist, in that you seize on an emotion for emotion's sake only ; you divorce it from its justifiable reason and revel in it alone ; when you come to its reason you are frightened of it. Be as emotional as you like, but swallow the whole thing. Even the strictest sociologist (that most dreary of the scientists), would admit that the emotion of a mother's love for a dead child was not quite unjustified. Even I, in this post-romantic mood, am prepared to recognize that there is something to be said for the desire to wander in strange places with strange people, but the desire, so as not to lapse into futile sentimentality, must be (like the stories I read in my childhood) founded on fact, or a real love for this sort of thing, not on a love for *seeing oneself* doing this sort of thing.

Cursing myself thus, and thinking on a suitable definition of "sentimentality," (which I eventually decided was the predominance of self-consciousness in emotion) I walked back to the encampment of the evening before, and found that everything had been very quickly packed up ready for departure, and that already the cold remains of last night's supper had been half eaten up. I drank a cup of strong tea which the woman had made for us and then quite firmly announced that I was going to leave the road and take to the hills south of me. I knew that agile though the pony was, and the cart unbreakable, nothing on wheels could cross the swamps and valleys which I vaguely indicated with a gesture southwards.

I was taken leave of with much extravagant formality. The woman gave me a few sweets, the man much advice as to where to cross the next glen, which had a deep stream in it, and the dark youth gave me a superb great smile which lasted about half a second. The children just stared, and for a moment stopped talking.

I turned round to look at them once again before the mist finally obscured them from me, and the last I saw of them was the man moving one of the children out of the way as he was carrying some of the baggage into the cart. He moved the child by taking it by its wrist and flinging it on one side. It was thrown about six or eight feet, and I distinctly saw it sail through the air like a sack of pitchforked rubbish, and fall on to a clump of heather or ling. . . . A remarkable family!

Strangely enough I came across them once again. It was later on in the same journey. I had been delayed with a sore throat and a fever at a farm where I was resting, and they must have passed me on the journey southwards. It was at a ferry north of Oban that I overtook them again—one of those heavily used ferries which during the latter end of the season carry over as many as a hundred or so motors a day. As I walked down to the landing-place, I heard the sound of very gasping and (I thought) badly played pipes. When I saw the player I

was astonished to discover that he was my old friend, the man. The woman was walking up and down the side of the waiting motors trying to wheedle the occupants into buying white heather "from Ben Lomond," and the youth was crouched in his customary wild-cat attitude some yards away, watching the scene with his restless eyes. I could not see the children anywhere.

I was amused to see how different were the manners of these people now. Their English was still broken, and often incomprehensible, but it flowed on in a very assured way; only the youth was as shy as ever. But what I was most struck with was the way in which the man begged for payment for his piping as the motors drew down to the incoming ferry-boat. He swept off his bonnet and with open and easy gestures approached the Fords and Rolls Royces without the slightest hint at cringing. It was not in the least a beggar asking alms; it was a gentleman wondering if another would be so kind as to oblige him with a loan. The freedom, the wide sweep of the bonnet, the not very profound bow, reminded me of the way in which rather courtly old men come into drawing-rooms, the right hand extended to greet their hostess, every bend and movement an easy formality of a school of manners now almost disappeared. My friend's manners on this occasion showed up strangely against the machine-like gestures and expressions of the people in the motors. I think his extravagance a little embarrassed some of them. I sat well up the landing stage, out of sight of my friends and watched the fascinating pantomime for nearly half an hour. I have never seen such a fine way of behaving under such filthy clothes.

XIV

I HAVE during the last twenty pages or so been deliberately a little vague about my route, in order that I may not too exactly specify the Gothic hotel which I strove to make

look ridiculous. I am now, I think, sufficiently far from it to be able to say that after I had left the tinker family on the morning after my distressing night, I had rounded the end of one or two lochs and was heading into the country of Morar. I could see very little of this remote and fascinating part of Scotland during my journey through it, because throughout all the days I was trudging through its winding valleys and by its lochs and seashores, the air was full of a drenching West Highland mist and rain. No other rain or mist is quite so hopeless as this kind. Not only does it wet one to the belly, but it has a quality of being able to suggest that it will never lift, never allow the sun again to show itself on this landscape. It is this quality this aspect of hopelessness, that is responsible for the general impression among English people that it does nothing but rain on the West Coast of Scotland. I hastily admit that it does rain there *pretty* frequently, but that alone would not be sufficient : it is the enveloping gloom of that kind of rain which, having been once endured on a Highland road or inspected hour after hour through a Gothic hotel window, leaves so deep an impression on the mind.

The mist can quite suddenly give the lie to itself. At its thickest moment it can rise for about five minutes, allow an area of about two or three square miles to be as drenched in sun as in water, and then it will close again over one's head and leave one as hopeless as ever. Two or three times on my journey through Morar and Moidart this happened, and I was permitted for a tantalizing few minutes to see the colours all around me; then they were taken from me again. Once when I was coming down to the sea the sun came out, and I stood still and looked all round at the prim, almost English, little valley which was thus illuminated for me. It was full of trees ; I am shockingly ignorant of trees and I cannot say what kind of trees they were, save that they were not coniferous, looked like the kind I am accustomed to see in an English landscape, and had large, bright-green leaves.

Somewhere in one of them a cuckoo was making a very great to do. In the village at the end of the valley nearly all the white cottages had gardens in which the flowers displayed, as loudly as they could, the brilliant colours of the North. Behind this domestic little valley a range of steep black mountains dominated the sky ; the sea that lapped round the rocks was quite obviously the Atlantic ; apart from these two, the mountains and the sea, which clearly proclaimed the North, the place might have been some Devonshire village which had gone in for rather brilliant horticulture.

It was at this village that I stayed on the second night of my journey through Morar. I discovered that the place was Catholic, and I stayed so as to be able to hear Mass the next morning. I found a cottage where for an absurdly small payment I was given supper and a sofa made up for a bed. It was a curious experience seeing on the walls of this Highland peasant's dwelling pictures of " The Sacred Heart " and photographs of pilgrimages to Loudres. They had exactly that tawdriness and glitter by which you may know the domestic ornaments of the Faithful throughout the world. The gilt frames with the holy words stamped on hideous little discs all round them were precisely the same kind as those that are used by a slum-dweller in Liverpool, a peasant in the South of France and any bourgeois in Italy or Spain. It is a remarkable institution, the Catholic Church, and I am very glad I belong to it.

After I had had my supper in these pious surroundings, I wandered up to have a look at the hotel which was quite near the village and from which I heard great sounds of piping going on. It was quite an inoffensive place, the ordinary half-whitewashed Highland hotel that has grown out of an eighteenth-century inn, and which still keeps a bar for the locals to drink at. It was from this bar that the deafening clamour of the pipes was coming, and as I opened the door it was like letting a douche of sound fall over my head. It was a minute before I could see

round the ill-lit room—the mist had again descended and cut off the light of day. But when I had made my way to a corner and sat down, I found that there were half a dozen or so silent Highlanders sitting smoking and drinking all round the room, and that strutting up and down the stone floor a tall, ragged old man, with a mangy-looking beard of a few weeks' age, was squealing out some terrific tune upon his pipes.

There was a lot of rather oddly Celtic emotion about. Without there being any regular or continued appreciative conversation, every one of the men in the room would now and again break into some obviously rather passionate and unrestrained exclamation of delight at the music. These were always in Gaelic and only one word here and there could I understand. At the end of each tune, there would be much drinking of whisky, gesticulating and violent discussion and praise, which, even when it lapsed half into English, I could not follow. The big strong-looking men, with their black hair and blue eyes, silent, or passionately noisy by fits and starts, the clouds of cheap eye-smarting tobacco smoke through which I could only just see the figures of the men and the gleam of the fire, the smell of peat and of the spilt whisky—all this made a scene which it was difficult to believe was happening in the twentieth century and in Great Britain.

I timidly ventured into conversation with one of my neighbours, who was delighted to speak to me. I asked him about the music maker, and I learnt that he was a travelling piper who walked all over the Highlands in the summer months, usually playing like this in pubs for what he could get in the way of drinks and a few pennies ; sometimes, however, he would be employed to play at gatherings and dances. He had a famous Scottish name (which is not common enough for me to repeat) and he was very well known and respected, so I was assured, in the West.

I then—in the manner of the government inspector, I fear—went on to ask about the district and whether it was

all as Catholic as it appeared. One or two of the others heard me, and soon I was being bombarded with polite information from all sides. Even the travelling piper stopped his music and joined in the general game of telling me things about the countryside. They all soon perceived that I was interested in religion and began to talk about their priests and school-teachers. There was such an air of politeness and of all-is-well-with-the-world about, that I got the impression that these pastors and masters of theirs combined all the virtues and all the beauties in their persons. The local goods were clearly being boosted for my benefit. Other visitors to this remote neighbourhood might ask about the fishing, the mountain climbing, the shooting : for them all the kindly interest of these villagers would, I am sure, concentrate on the sea trout, the hills and the grouse ; these commodities would be praised as the local religion was being praised for my benefit. In the middle of this talk one of the men happened to glance out of the window and saw a priest passing. He at once cried out in an excited voice (which for the other visitors he would have reserved for announcing that a six-pound sea trout was jumping), " There goes the holy Mac——."

I at once felt incumbent on me to jump up and look earnestly out of the window. All the others, to be polite and to hand out further information, hastened to join me, and a cluster of faces was almost immediately pressed against the window, peering out into the misty evening landscape. With the sound in my ears of the muttered exclamations of pious approval of the way the holy man walked, wore his hat, carried his stick, I watched a perfectly ordinary fat little black-coated man waddling his way past the hotel front. I waited; straining my eyes after him, until the mist had closed round him again ; then, feeling that politeness had been satisfied, I went back to my seat and stood a drink all round.

The piper was so impressed by this happy event that he distended his lungs and his pipe-bag until they looked

as if they were going to burst, and then let forth so loud and squealing a tune that the hotel-keeper came in from his parlour and said he had had enough of that damned noise, and told him to stop piping. He didn't want his respectable guests in the hotel, he added, to think that he would harbour a drunken, dirty noisemaker for ever in his bar. There was much muttering and discontent at this, and I was informed that the hotel-keeper was not a local man, but one who had come into these parts from the East and who was always causing rows like this. As he was the only dispenser of drinks in the village, he was almost a dictator in a situation like this, and so the piping had to stop. The piper, however, had his revenge. He was intending to travel on the next day and so did not fear the wrath of the publican. He bought a bottle of beer, a strange purchase for a Highlander, which I could not understand at first; but the purpose of it was soon revealed to me. He then went out on to the front of the hotel and started walking up and down playing his pipes to a violent and quick tune. As he walked he swayed this way and that, appearing only to keep his balance by a miracle. Every now and again he would take the bottle of beer out of his pocket and take a pull at it, allowing the liquid to flow down over his beard and shirt. The wild music, and the swaying, drunken-looking old man periodically douching himself with liquor, together produced a shockingly abandoned effect. I noticed with amusement that the "respectable people" in the hotel, disgusted and yet fascinated by the sight and sound, had all collected in the drawing-room window and had their faces pressed against the glass.

The old man was no more drunk than the Archbishop of Canterbury when he opens a conference on the Prayer Book. Indeed, he must have been remarkably sober to sway so acrobatically, to play the pipes so well, and not to fall down. The furious hotel-keeper, after having shouted at him once or twice, had to leave him, for he could do nothing to a man playing on the King's highway, and

though, I daresay, he might have charged him with making a noise outside his house, the local policeman was either unobtainable or on the side of the piper. As the evening finally drew in and the mists concentrated into a fine persistent rain, I walked home to my cottage and could still hear in the distance like the note of a mosquito, the wailing and squealing of the old man's pipes.

It was still raining the next day, as I took my course southward, and mounted out of this valley to pass between what I could occasionally distinguish to be very steep and black hills. The path ran continually by the sea and I was seldom far from the smell or the sound of it. The mist has a deadening effect on most sound when you are walking through it for long as I had been. The silence around you becomes almost audible. There is no noise, save what you make yourself, and even that can seem distant and unreal. It is quite different from walking on the darkest night, for then, though you may visually be as, or more, cut off from your surroundings, innumerable tiny noises reach you from far away and from near. In the mist, the white around you is like a winding sheet, and the complete lack of sound makes you think that you are for ever cut off from the world. The depressing effect of the damp in the air and the feeling that I should never be free of this circumambient gloom made me welcome the sea whenever I came near enough to it to hear it. It was a dead calm day; the surface of the water was quite undisturbed, and the only movement was the lazy swell which, in these western seas, is never still. The shore here is rocky or covered with small pebbles, but there is no sand. The gentlest swell, therefore, when it runs over them, turns these little stones over and over in its movement and foam, and the sound of this is like a long sigh. It is a sound which has insinuated itself into the speech of the West Highlanders, indeed it is almost human itself. In the regular intervals, in the slightly varying loudness as the tide advances, it is like some primitive woman's mourning, or " keening " as they call

it; and is one of the most melancholy sounds imaginable. The only other thing that you may hear with it is the crying of the sea-birds far above in the mist.

For the whole day I trudged along never daring to leave the little path which I had struck, for the mist varied in intensity and there were times when I could hardly see twenty feet ahead of me. I only met two people the whole day, two men walking up to the village I had come from. Even these Highlanders seemed a little oppressed by the loneliness of the day, and both stopped to have a talk with me and to exchange cigarettes. By evening, thoroughly footsore and hungry, I reached Glenfinnan where I stayed the night, sleeping almost like a dead man.

When I woke up next morning I was stiff and felt that my throat was beginning to be sore. However, I determined to see if I could drag myself on to Fort William that day, where I told myself I would give myself a proper rest. Before I started well on the road I wandered down to the end of Loch Shiel to see the place where the Standard had been raised at the beginning of the attempt in 1745.

It is quite impossible, if one is at all sensitive, to say anything of what one really feels about that business. The whole thing has been so despoiled, slopped over, mucked about, by halfpenny romanticists, that no one, short of a Shakespeare, could nowadays lift it out of the morass into which it has been dragged. Its song tunes have become music-hall favourites, its stories and its traditions have become the lucrative property of any footling sentimentalist who wants to make money out of the Woolworth public. And the descendants of those who made the thing itself are mostly in America or Canada.

The appearance of Loch Shiel Head and the Church there can, yet, be mentioned. Though the day was grey and quite without sun, the mist had lifted, giving place to a drizzling rain which did not interfere with my

view and allowed me to look for miles down the loch. It is deep, long and narrow, and the high hills on either side drop straightly and darkly into it. Save for the shrill green of the trees, the scene reminded me of the pictures I had seen of Norwegian fiords. At the head of this loch which, though it is difficult to believe, is an arm of the sea (its other end some twelve miles away being connected by a small channel with the Atlantic), there stands the monument to Prince Charles Edward Stuart. It is a column about fifty feet high with a square base decorated in the last fading remnants of the baroque manner. It was built about 1810. On the top of the column there is placed a statue of the Prince, gazing into the land which he had come to regain for his father. It is difficult from the ground to see whether the statue is well done or not, but it is at least inoffensive and simple. On the four sides of the square base there is written in four languages the name of the Prince and why the monument is there to him. On the front it is in English. It is on the back, I think, that it is in Gaelic, and on one side in French and the other Latin. The legends are all fairly long and ornate and are supposed each to mean the same thing, each to be translations of one composition. I doubt this. This is a point upon which I can easily be tripped up; for anyone who took more trouble than I did, can correct my vague recollection that they all seemed to read rather differently.

The English legend says that the monument was erected to Prince Charles Edward Stuart who raised the Standard on this spot at the beginning of his unfortunate attempt to regain "the kingdom lost by the imprudence of his ancestors." I forget the exact words, but I remember that a part of it runs like that. It gives the impression that the man who wrote it was sympathetic to the attempt but was being very cautious to guard himself against this being noticed. I quite forget the French version, but I know that there did not seem to me to be much difference. It was in the Latin, however, that I noticed the

absence of any such phrase as *imprudentia majorum*; and the word *tristis* somehow seems much less condemnatory than "unfortunate"—even at the beginning of the last century. The Latin, I thought, expressed more clearly the feelings of the writer. I then walked round to the Gaelic side. This was, of course, quite beyond me. I have only a few words of spoken Gaelic, I cannot read a syllable of its monstrous spelling. I looked at it a long time, trying to puzzle out the meaning of a word here or there, but could get no farther than the attractive phrase : "*Prions Tearlich*" (you can understand what that means if you say it aloud). While I was looking at this I noticed coming down from the hill, a good way off, an old Highlander, and I determined to wait till he came and to ask him to translate it for me. He did so in his high, beautiful English, not pausing for a word. I was enchanted by the flow of his speech, and did not for a moment either feel inclined or dare to be so rude as to take down what he said. Most of the words are faded out of my mind now, but I do remember that in his version there was no attempt to hide the sympathy of the writer. There was nothing about imprudence of ancestors here ; it was all in the strain of "to regain for his father that kingdom which by the laws of God and man was rightfully his."

You will perceive that I have still no proof that this was the Gaelic version. It was probably not. The old man very likely exaggerated the translation beyond all reason, but I am fairly sure that the Gaelic was, to put it mildly, a little warmer than the English.

When I had thanked the old man for his politeness, I walked up to look at the little church at Glenfinnan, which also stands at the head of Loch Shiel, but farther up the hillside. It lies deep in the dark green of a pine wood, but there is a clearing in front of it which runs straight down to the loch. Because of some tradition, the story of which I don't know, the west door is always open. And so, if you stand on the altar steps you may look through the little church, across the churchyard and

the trees, and see right down the loch which lies at the foot of the hill. Conversely, the devout Highlander who is rowing up the loch to Mass on a winter morning may see from far off the light of the candles on the altar which will tell him that he is late and must row more quickly.

When I found the church it was deserted, quite empty. There was no one even in the churchyard, and standing at the west door I could look around all over the loch and the hills and not see a sign of humanity. There was in this loneliness, in the trustfulness of this great open door, something that profoundly affected me. When I had said my prayers and gazed my fill I walked down into the churchyard, where I found hanging a huge monster of a bell with some Irish Gaelic written on it. It was hung only just off the ground and as I touched it, ever so gently and with the soft palm of my hand, it gave out a deep moaning note which I could only just hear.

The journey on the Fort William road after this was distressingly tedious. With the advance of day the inevitable mist closed round the road again; and I had here the noise of no sea to vary the unchanging gloom. My throat, moreover, was beginning to trouble me more, and by evening the cold, damp air had so influenced it that I felt all over me the shiver of a feverish cold. I had passed on this road only one motor since Glenfinnan, and I did not think I stood much chance of getting in to Fort William that night. So, about six o'clock, I decided to throw myself on the mercy of the inhabitants of a farm which lay a little way off the road.

I was very kindly received, and when I had explained that my throat was aching (it felt as if it was made of swollen and inflamed leather) and that my head and limbs were full of fever, I was at once taken into a room where there was a deep, soft Scottish bed, and was allowed to lie there and drink the hot milk which the farmer's wife brought to me. The people in the farm were accustomed to putting people up who failed on the road to Fort William, and so I soon came to an agreement about being

allowed to stay there in bed for a few days until my fever had left me. I was charged very little and looked after with all the traditional hospitality of the race. And, though it did not occur to me at the time, it was extremely kind of them to take in a rather shabby, damp, miserable young man, who was suffering from something that might have been anything under the sun (or the mist, to be more correct) from a cold in the head to scarlet fever.

When I was well enough to go on I took a lift in a motor into Fort William and stayed in that depressing little town for one night. The rest of my journey on foot down the west coast was a thorough West Highland tramp. Never for one moment did the wind change from the west. Now and again the clouds would roll apart as they did once at the ferry at Ballachhulish, exposing the superb black mountains by Glencoe. But, for the rest, I would walk on hour after hour through the sweeping white and grey of the saturated air. I refused to take another lift or a train. I crossed two ferries and wandered on for almost a week, bearing southward and nearly always by the murmurous sea. I had been annoyed with myself for the way I had been so easily disgusted by the squalor of the tinkers up in Morar. And so now, I was determined that I should not allow myself to funk the depression of West Highland weather. I had delighted in the emotion of finding the West Highlands in their full and lonely summer beauty. I was frightened that I should display to myself my own weakness by throwing up the game as soon as they got unpleasant. This sort of thing, I told myself, was just as much the West Highlands as were the June days on Rannoch and Glen Shiel. This contributed just as much to the Celtic character I professed to admire so strongly. If I gave in to this I was a proved and gross sentimentalist.

But there is no denying that after two days it became very tedious. My nervous energy began to ebb from me in a continuous stream. The people I met on my journey, and in the places where I stayed for the nights, seemed to

me more and more dour and less of the genial and open type that I had delighted in farther north. And, when at last I found myself descending into large Western Harbour town, I had to admit to myself that I was tired, angry and depressed.

XV

In the harbour my eye kept wandering back to the town and I saw in it all that I disliked in Scotland. I was saddened now in reflection. I thought of how the Scotland that I adored was being spoilt, and of all the cheap profanation of the sad lonely spaces of the North. Of those spaces that were lonely without their rightful inhabitants, the crofters, and to think of which being owned by rich London business men was horrible enough for anything. But now it was even worse, now that they were delivered quite over into the hands of the cheap as well as nasty—it was very depressing, at least so I thought (I may have been wrong) as I stood at the harbour side and looked over the wet and glistening town of Oban. It was all ending, I told myself, all that I liked about this part of the world. I had had an amusing and enjoyable holiday, but I must not come up here again. There were plenty of other amusing places to go to of which the essential charm was not vanishing. The French culture, the cool, straight white lines of the modern city, the telephones, the delicious iced drinks, the whole direct nervous passion of modern life. These things were second best, but still they did exist, and it was to these things, I repeated to myself, that I must now turn. No, it was not cowardice, it was, so I believed, just facing facts. There was no good in going on mooning after the sentimental glories of the more comfortable and romantic age. That was all over ; other things, some bad, like the worst of the cheap cars, some good, like skyscrapers, were taking their place. It was as foolish to talk about decline

as about progress. There was no good in fighting for an absolute standard, one would become just stupidly lonely. There was no absolute—to such a level of dreariness was I reduced.

I wandered along one side of the harbour. Out in the bay lay the long, luxurious form of a yacht; and moored in beside the quay there was a collection of small fishing smacks. I stopped and looked over the edge into one of them. The men in it were arranging their nets in the stern of the boat, with the slow action of sailormen, which gets through so much in so short a space of time. They were talking Gaelic which even my unpractised ear could detect was different from the ordinary Gaelic. It was softer and prettier. My loneliness mastered my timidity, and after having watched the boat for about five minutes, I greeted one of them with difficulty in his own language, and said, profoundly, that it was raining. He replied kindly and with a quick high intonation which soon carried me far out of my depth ; so I had to lapse back into my English, while he continued to speak in a kind of mixture of the two languages.

" You have been walking far ? " he asked me, looking at my bedraggled clothes and my rucksack.

" All round Scotland," I exaggerated.

" Inteed, inteed, and it is a fine thing to walk like that. If I were a young man, I would walk with you as far as we can. Yes, inteed."

" Oh, but my walk is ended now, sir, for I can do no work to keep me on the road, and my money is nearly all spent ; so I shall have to get back to England now," I complained.

" Oh, I am sorry," he replied kindly, but with no meaning, and continued with his nets.

" You are Catholic ? " I said, for I had noticed a tiny crucifix which he had hung round his neck and was visible through his torn jersey.

" Yess." The reply was quite without that defiant note with which Catholics in England (and, alas ! even

more so in Scotland) confess their religion. It was a proud statement of fact.

"So am I."

"Inteed I am glad. We are all Catholics on this boat."

I was excited by this information, and asked him whether he and his mates came from the Arisaig and Morar district.

"No. From the island of Barra."

And then I remembered about Barra—the remote and Holy Island of the outer Hebrides, which has kept the faith lonely and secure without Reformation or Counter-Reformation.

"Will you take me in your boat back to Barra?"

"Yess." And the reply had no surprise in it, nor formal politeness. It was a sigh of courteous assent.

In about two hours' time, when all the nets had been folded up and everything was ready, we set sail—if so melodious a phrase can be applied to our chug-chugging out of harbour—for even in the most remote islands now the sail is only used as an auxiliary, or in the event of the engines of the fishing-boats breaking down. And I was borne out on to the smooth misty sea of the Hebrides by these pleasant sailors with my only recommendations—a bottle of whisky and my catholicism. Their Gaelic was swiftly spoken and very soft. I could not understand a word of it, and so they politely began to speak in English when they were near me, in case I should feel out of it. I begged them, however, to use the language that was easier to them, and listened with the deepest contentment to the lovely unintelligible sentences.

We made our course up the Sound of Mull, which is not more than a mile wide, and we could see on either side of us the dark-green pine forests and high rocks which fringe this narrow channel. They looked forbidding in the rain, mist and advancing dusk, but soon disappeared into the night, and then, for all that, our eyes told us we might have been already far out in the Atlantic, save that there was no swell and the little waves ran

smacking and bobbing against our prow in a way that spoke of sheltering land.

At ten o'clock we had a meal of boiled herrings and bread and cocoa in the tiny cabin. It was lucky that I am a good sailor, for the cocoa was very sweet and the herrings rich in fat and oil—we ate them with our fingers, picking them out of a communal bowl—and all the while an odorous lamp swung and gleamed above our heads, its faint and transitory rays transmuting the skin on the sailors' faces and arms into a deep red gold. I was amused—I avoid the word "touched"—to see how the deliberate piety of the Scots race was triumphant in these Catholic fishermen. Before each one dipped his fingers into the herring bowl for the first time, he would very slowly cross himself on his mouth and his breast, mutter a Gaelic prayer, and then cross himself once again from the forehead. I felt that the quick perfunctory gesture which I had made before my food, stood out disgracefully against this background, and was careful to imitate the way they finished up their meal.

At eleven o'clock, having done the washing-up of bowls and mugs, and having handed round my whisky flask for a general pull at it, I turned into the tiny hard little bunk which they had to spare, and fell asleep more happy than I have been for years.

We were past Tobermory and well out towards the Island of Coll before I had awakened again. The mainland was now quite distinctly the mainland, and far behind us, as the perfect morning showed me when I climbed out on to the little deck. There had been no wind since the night, and so I don't know how the mist had gone; but it was gone, sucked right up into the heavens, and the Atlantic, save for a long leisurely swell, was smooth and oily beneath the sun.

I confess I was not prepared for this sort of thing. I knew that the West Coast of Scotland could assume any climate almost that it chose, and I had often felt the strange, persistent heat of the north-west sun by the

Atlantic coast : but the Hebrides ! I had never thought of those islands except as in a mist, lonely rocks and peat hags floating far out in the desolate sea, and I had always seen them in my fancy enclosed in an indeterminate white cloud. But this—this was an Italian sea. It was blue enough to be painful to the eyes ; it was as undisturbed as the sea of Paradise ; and behind us there arose the great coloured mountains of Scotland. We were not too far out to see the little white crofts at the bases of those nearest to us ; and I was reminded of the houses of the vine-growers, which cluster round the foot of Stromboli in the Mediterranean. Italian—in a way that word fitted an element in the scene, in a way, it missed so much. It missed the truly heavenly peace of the Hebridean sea on such a day. Heavenly, because it reminds one of Heaven; there is no other peacefulness that I have met on earth that is like it. It is therefore—and I do not apologize for it—Heavenly.

Before us Coll was lying, a low, long, barren rock, and to the south of it Tiree showed something that might reasonably be called a mountain. We turned through the narrow straits between these islands, and made north-west out for the open sea. I asked one of my companions what happened when a storm overtook them on this part of their journey to Barra. He told me that it was only very rarely, and when they were sure of the weather, that fishing smacks as small as this one ventured as far as the mainland, and that they usually only cruised up and down the eastern and sheltered side of the reef of the outer islands. This reef did not now protect us, for Barra is the most southern and westerly of this group of islands and we were making north-west all the time.

I soon began to be aware of this unprotectedness. The surface of the sea (now ever so slightly ruffled with wavelets), moved with an obviously profounder swell. The sky cleared itself even more of the remains of the last night's mist. The retreating mountains of the mainland, and those of Skye and Rum showing to the north of us,

began to grow hard and clear in their outlines, while the sea's blue became more vivid and more deep.

We slowly and unvaryingly chugged on our way over the mountains and valleys made by the swell, and good sailor though I am, I began to feel uneasy when I was washing-up after the midday meal. I was so stupid as to lie down after this instead of going on deck, and remained there for three or four hours on my bunk, my stomach protesting but my heart still happy. When at last I understood my mistake, and also heard one of the sailors telling me that in half an hour we should be at Barra, I lugged myself up on deck and took a fresh look at our position. The mainland had now quite subsided, though I could still see Skye to the north ; and our objective—our island of Barra—had swum up out of the Atlantic to meet us.

The evening sun when the sky is quite clear gives the sea a sharper, colder tinge of blue. It also can touch to an almost crude rosiness a pink that one just hesitates to call vulgar—any land or rocks that one may see across the blue of the ocean. Barra and its satellite islands, influenced by the glories of the evening, arose like great pink mountains from the Atlantic. Compared with the hills of the mainland which we had some twenty-four hours ago left behind us, these were no true mountains, but after a day of plodding across the sea, they appeared quite high and forbidding. To the south, the great cliffs of Barra Head faced the endless sea, and even at this distance, we could watch the slow swell bursting against them with long, deliberate pauses. The foam (so full were the waves, and so far were we from them), would rise against the rocks no more quickly than great white animals stretching themselves after sleep ; they would dissolve and fall with equal leisure.

As we passed Muldoanich, the guardian island of Barra's only harbour, we swung to the right (I forget whether that is port or starboard), and I got my first sight of Castlebay. The sun now was on our left and so faced

more directly the land we were approaching ; not as before, glinting and glancing off it ; so now, instead of making it only glow with a reflected pink, it brought out shrilly and clearly the true colours. The rocks were black, the lichen and grass on the hill-sides were bright green, and the grey little houses and crofters' dwellings which go to make up the tiny village of Castlebay, were picked out sharply against their circumstances.

In the middle of the bay, upon a rock no bigger than the foundation of that which it supports, there stands the immemorially old castle of the MacNeils of Barra—the most surprising sight in Scotland. The sailors had told me about it, but when I saw it quite suddenly arising like a grey ghost out of the waves—which at high tide move directly against its base—I thought that the evening sun and my sickness had deceived me. But it was true ; it really was. And soon our little boat came right up alongside it, glided round it and came to rest sheltering between it and the land. We anchored not a hundred yards from the shore, and as the sailors slowly packed up their nets preparatory to taking them on land, I sat on the edge of the boat and watched the movements of the people by the pier and in the little village street. A priest was talking to three fishermen ; women with shawls over their heads and with bare arms—that even at this distance I could see were deeply bronzed—were coming back from their work at the herring gutting. From the many little houses (those moss-covered stone dwellings so beloved by the Celt, and like him seeming to have grown naturally out of the soil of West Scotland) there curled up the peat smoke of the fires that were cooking the evening meals. The herring fleet was lying to the left of the pier ; and Ben Heaval behind the bay guarded the peaceful scene with his not too imposing nor too contemptible bulk.

The sea, as it always is on the West Coast when there is no wind blowing, was clearer than the purest glass, and when I had seen all that I could of Castlebay from the

deck of our boat, I peered down into the dark green depths and watched the lythe and saithe wandering in and out amongst the garden of seaweed which grows round the submerged basis of the Castle Rock. Now and again the hideous form of a crab would emerge and then lose itself, while the long brown fronds moved gently under the influence of the tide.

At last the nets were ready, and I was rowed on shore in a dinghy, with my pack on my back and my stick once again in my hand. I had been thoroughly sick of walking on the mainland, and I thought with relief that on this island my wanderings would be pleasantly restricted, and that those torturing days of forcing oneself to reach a certain spot before nightfall were here definitely done with. The dinghy touched the shore, and I stepped out on to the celebrated "tangle of the Isles"—that slippery brown weed whose treacherous surface has been the means of making many a pompous politician cut a ridiculous figure when landing for the first time on one of the islands of his constituency. Though not a politician, I was deceived in the same way, and fell forward on my hands and knees, scattering my goods about me in the slime. There was no deputation awaiting me, and so I recovered with no greater hurt than bruised knees and wrists, and cautiously felt my way over the remainder of the rocks, until I stepped on to the village street.

Here, hat in hand, I addressed myself to the priest who had been watching my arrival, and asked if he could tell me where I might find lodgings and food. Father Campbell is the most courteous and kindly of men, and with his directions and help I soon found a little house where I was generously received. I had a meal of porridge, herrings and heather honey, and then, too tired to explore more than my immediate surroundings, I found my way up to the village church. It is built of a fine light grey stone a little way up the hill, and from the west door you may look far out over the bay and to the Island of Vatersay. Though the church has not been long built,

it has a primitive, a Celtic simplicity about the inside. I do not say that its decorations are beautiful—that is too much to say of the internal decorations of any Catholic church—but they have an oddly different note from those of an English or French church. As I knelt to say my prayers before the shrine of Our Lady of the Sea, there were, all around me fisher folk, men and women, muttering their evening prayers in their own sad, impassioned language.

From the village church, by a natural sequence I found my way to the village pub, where I drank two excellent glasses of neat whisky, which I proudly (though somewhat I fear, in the manner of the tourist) asked for in Gaelic, and then returned to my bed. I fell asleep while the daylight was still alive, and with the crying of the sea birds still in my ears.

XVI

I AWOKE next morning to another fine day; and so I decided to walk round the Island. I took my pack with me so as to carry my food, and a flask, and set out to the south-west towards the Atlantic side of the Island.

The road round Barra is about fifteen or sixteen miles long, but as it omits large pieces of land both at the north and the south end, the real circumference of the Island is about ten miles more. There is only one real hill (or mountain it might be called), Ben Heaval, which is in the centre of the Island. But for one accustomed to the English landscape there are two or three other "protuberances" which are quite impressive and are much bigger than the Malvern Hills. To the east of Barra there is the wide stretch of the Minch (La Manche) between it and the mainland. On the north there runs the chain of the Outer Hebrides of which the nearest island is Eriskay, where Prince Charles Edward first set foot on his father's kingdom in 1745. On the south side

there are six consecutive islands, Vatersay, Sandray, Pabbay, Mingulay, Bernuray and Barra Head, all of which are so small and closely linked together that they can be included in the group of Barra Islands. To the west there is no land before America. Though there are scattered crofts nearly all the way round the road, there are really only three villages or hamlets : Castlebay the capital, North Bay, and Craigston (or Balnacraig). These names were all given after the Island was surveyed and mapped out by English-speaking people, hence their English sound.

The west side of the Island is fretted by the waves of the Atlantic but has some fine curved beaches made of the most delicately white sand. On these beaches, and in the bays and coves on the north, the seals lie out and sun themselves. There are two or three little streams which can hold some surprisingly big sea trout, and when the Atlantic is booming in, the rain streaming down, and these little burns in spate you can see some fine, big silver bodies leaping to get at them. There are two lochs, one of which has a miniature MacNeil's Castle in the middle of it—a fantastic thing no bigger than the average London drawing-room, a castle in the middle of a loch in the middle of an island in the middle of the Atlantic. It was used by the MacNeils as a dungeon. It is not true, as one sometimes hears, that there are no trees on Barra. There are two little groves, one at North Bay and one between Castlebay and North Bay. This last was loud with the noise of cuckoos when I passed it, a strange sound in this remote and haunted island.

There is one " big house " on the Island, Eoligarry House, built some time in the last century. But the Island is not owned by the inhabitant of it. Barra is now entirely free from the curse of landlordism.

Socially, politically (or whatever the right word for it is), Barra is almost ideal. All the land, save those parts of it which are clearly barren, as on the slopes of Heaval, is split up into crofts, each of which is cultivated by one

family. These crofts are tended by the old people and the children. The young men and youths man the herring fleet which, during the summer, nightly fishes the Minch. The young women throughout the long summer days, gut and pack the herrings for the mainland markets. Of the herring fleet each little boat accommodates about eight men, and so is owned communally between four families. This economic state of affairs springs from a double virtue. It is the immemorial right of the Islanders, and has been preserved intact by the courage and fighting spirit of the men of Barra. Throughout the nineteenth century, when landlordism was at its height, there were many attempts made to sweep away the crofts on Barra, and those on Vatersay which the Barra people had made for themselves. Someone would issue a decree that the crofts were to be levelled out and the ground kept free for the designs of the landlord—though what designs, sporting or commercial, any landlord could have had on the Island of Vatersay beats me. And then bailiffs, factors and all the dreary tribe of them would come over from the mainland. There would be a fight, some broken heads, and a dozen or so rather dimly uncomprehending lads would spend the winter in gaol on the mainland. That is all over now, though only just over. And the land is securely inhabited again by those who for centuries have lived on it and wrung a living from its not very fruitful surface. The Islanders are all Catholics.

Those few Protestants who live on Barra are all recent immigrants, and are tolerated with a smiling wonder.

Now, my point about all this is that it is living, virile—it works. These people (and I stayed long enough on the Island to find this out) are happy, healthy and philosophically sound. Here is a Catholic individualist community in which the thing *works*. It is a living, admirable organism. There are many—sentimentalists and sensible men—who have been enchanted by the atmosphere of these remote Islands ; none feels the

frightening fascinating Celtic charm more than myself. Indeed only a few paragraphs ago I was betrayed into the word "haunting," but what leaps out beyond all this atmosphere business in Barra is the proud fact that here the Celt is not conquered, subjugated and reduced to a picturesquely sad figure. He has won ; his mode of life is triumphant. And it works, it works.

My circuit of the Island on this first day did not take me long ; for in this Western air I was very invigorated. I met a few crofters on the way who all greeted me with "*Var Preeor.*" (That is the English spelling, the one I have invented myself, for I don't know the Gaelic way ; and to get a true idea of what it sounds like, you must let the letter H run through the whole phrase between each letter ; it means, "It's a beautiful day.") And I would have to answer, "*Ahah Var Preeor,*" drawing out the syllables so that the phrase lasted till long after we had tramped past each other. Sometimes they would again repeat it if we were still in earshot.

Apart from these, there was little incident on my circumambulation, save a ridiculous thing that happened to me at North Bay. I entered this village just as the children were coming out of school. I was carrying my pack on my back ; I was raggedly dressed and must have looked a strange figure. I at once drew the attention of these wide-eyed creatures, who, mistaking me for a gypsy or travelling packman, crowded round me asking what I had to sell or give them : so I interpreted their gestures and their quite unintelligible speech. My shouted mixture of English and badly-pronounced Gaelic had no effect on them. They pursued me until I was well out of the village and was already running. They then set up such a crying and cursing as I have never heard before.

I eventually descended again into Castlebay ; this time from the north at about four o'clock. I wandered down on to the pier side and there met a few of my shipmates of the previous day. They greeted me with a kindly enthusiasm, and were delighted with my obvious pleasure

in their Island. After we had talked and loafed about for some time, they asked me if I would care to come out with them that evening, as they were going herring fishing and expected a good haul. I accepted, and went back to my lodgings to leave my things, and to beg or borrow some oil-cloths and a "sou'wester."

Until the hauling-in of the nets there is little that is eventful in the herring fishing. We set sail at nine o'clock, and cruised up northwards, sheltered from the Atlantic swell by the string of islands which we kept always on the west of us. At twelve we began to lower away the nets until nearly a third of a mile of them were stretched out, floating with the tide. They were supported every twenty yards or so by a float; and when we came to the end of them we tied the last rope to our windlass, and the fishermen went down into the cabin—to drift about for a couple of hours, waiting for the nets to fill with the shoals of herring which were rumoured to be cruising about this evening. The motion of the swell slightly disturbed me, and so instead of going down into the cabin with the others I stopped on deck and watched what is the nearest approach to the midnight sun that I have ever seen. We were floating just between the islands of Eriskay and Barra, so that I could see straight out to the west and south, and was able to keep my eye upon the glow where the sun had sunk into the Atlantic. It never disappeared. The glow deepened, subsided, paled, and then, just when I had thought that I had seen the last of it—revivified and began to announce itself as the dawn. The sun reminded me of those timid children or females who boldly tell you that they have ducked, when they are bathing, but only make convulsive plunges which never quite submerge their terrified-looking faces. When the sun began to emerge again I could have laughed at the contemptible interval which is called night. Nevertheless, it was a very beautiful sight.

About two o'clock, that is to say just when the dawn was beginning, my companions came out of the cabin, and we

all stood to, to help with the pulling in of the nets. We were set to separate and definite jobs ; two men worked the pulley which hauled in the nets ; another arranged the floats ; another, carefully but swiftly folded back the nets when they were finished with ; to me and to a boy—the son of one of the fishermen there—fell the task of shaking and combing out the fish from the nets, and flinging them back into the hold. I have seldom seen anything which was quite so physically and coldly lovely. For the first fifty yards or so of the nets we found nothing ; then quite suddenly we began to pull on board over the tiny boat, sheets and sheets of shimmeringly ecstatic silver. My back was soon aching and my hands and arms up to the elbows slimy and wet with fishy blood, torn and bruised with the net. But throughout the long two hours which it took to haul in the net, I was never tired of watching the harvest. The herrings flopped, shivered, gleamed and died as I piled them into the hold ; but innumerable thousands more emerged from the black and moving sea. It seemed to me endless, but it was lovely. Moreover, I was glad that my friends were having such a good haul. I could see that they were excited and pleased. Their Gaelic was quick, high and happy sounding.

At last it was finished, and I crept back into the cabin now truly exhausted, and caring little for the movement of the swell. I fell half asleep as we made our homeward journey, and had to be awakened when we entered Castlebay at five o'clock in the morning. My friends had cooked some of the herrings and had boiled some cocoa. So we all had our breakfast on deck, again crossing ourselves in the slow, pious manner, which I was now ready to imitate, and dipping once again our fingers into the communal and greasy bowl.

In the unbelievable peace of early morning the Island was more than ever enchanting ; there was no one stirring in the village. The bay was glassy still, for our boat was the first to return, and the Castle was doubled in the

mirror of the sea. The colours—the subtle colours of the rocks, lichen and heather, began to discover themselves in the advancing light ; the awakening sea birds were already wheeling and crying above our heads ; while Heaval and the grey little church remained sentinel over the most peaceful breakfast I have ever had.

When at last I was put on shore—after an infinitely protracted meal—I was about as ready for bed as I have ever been in my life. I have many times come home with the dawn in London, and I know only too well that aching lust for sleep which lurks behind the eyeballs of the overtired. I know, also, only too well that like all lusts it is :

> " Mad in pursuit and in possession so
> Had, having, and in quest to have extreme
> A bliss in proof and proved a very woe."

(and all the rest of that hackneyed but perpetually useful quotation). A complete do, a have, for when one has left the grimly lightening street behind, climbed the stairs (so drab at this hour) and crept into bedroom and bed, having drawn the curtains to give at least a pretence of night to one's slumber, one finds that the last benefit of sleep is denied one. Even in the log-like unconsciousness which descends on one there is no real rest, only an uneasy foretaste of death. It is an effort to lie down; to keep the shape of one's body is exhausting. The only real rest would be to expand like a fluid—a pail of water thrown over the floor. Unconsciousness as much as consciousness keeps the true sleep from one, and all through one's thick dreams one holds before oneself as the only hope for real rest, the evening of the following day, when one knows that one will have thrown off this false exhaustion and will be able to approach bed with a truly humble body.

This kind of thing I have known. But it was a very different way in which I went to my bed after the evening's herring fishing. There are some kinds of fallings-asleep which are as deliciously physical thrills as one could ever

wish to have. The healthy and exhausted body enjoys the first moments of surrender to sleep as keenly as must a lover giving way for the first time to complete possession. It does not last long, but it is so sharp a pleasure, it is protracted so subtly by the fading senses, that the memory of it can sensually sweeten the whole day after. There are few pleasures like it. It occurs very rarely, for one has to lead normally an unhealthy life, with very occasional lapses of healthy exercise and exhaustion completely to enjoy it. It is a thrill given only to the courageous *viveurs* and occasional abstainers.

My friends with whom I had gone fishing told me that they intended to be up again by midday so that they might spend the afternoon cleaning and mending their nets. I went to bed, however, with the firm intention of remaining there until the next evening, and I am happy to say that for once I kept my resolve. Twelve hours of that magnificent Northern summer day (they told me it was one) passed over my unheeding head. When I woke up it was time for the evening meal. And the younger people in the house where I was staying were preparing to go down to the schoolroom for the dance which is held on Barra one Saturday evening in every month.

Though nervous lest I should make a fool of myself at the dance, I went with them, and by keeping myself well in a corner at first until my temperature had risen to the popular height, I succeeded in enjoying myself thoroughly. The people in Barra are distinctly good-looking—better than the average West Highlander, whose attractive face is often marred from a strictly æsthetic point of view by the exaggeration of one feature, which emotion or the weather has influenced out of all proportion to its surroundings. On Barra, the hair is dark, the eyes of the palest blue, and the mouths are generous and mobile, uninfluenced by excessive Puritanism or by the cold, for the weather in the southern Outer Hebrides is in many ways as temperate as in Devonshire. Occasionally the Celtic shape of the heads on Barra—I do not believe that

this Island was much influenced by Norse invasions—strikes the traveller from the South as being a little odd. But on the whole, apart from a few rather wild peculiarities of form and gesture, the Barra people are healthy, good-looking and full of beautiful movements.

The dance, then, was a pleasant sight ; it was also rather funny. The music was made by two accordions, as in the cheaper and more genuine French cabarets, and the energy of the dancers as they danced their reels and strathspeys was overwhelming.

The men were nearly all fishermen, and were in their best clothes for the occasion—navy-blue trousers and jerseys and black shoes. When I half shut my eyes, allowed the shrieking clamour of accordions to dominate my senses, and let the blue-clad dancing crowd move in an indeterminate mass before me, I could have thought that I was at Toulon, and that the French fleet was in. The same neat, slim, masculine figures, the same bright lights, and the same astounding noise, all made it difficult for me to believe that I was in the most remote island of the Hebrides and not upon an over-civilized town in the Mediterranean. The women were quite different from those at Toulon. They were larger, had bigger eyes, their arms were deeper brown and their demeanour less bold. Oddly enough their colours were often more brilliant, for many of them wore tartans and gay shawls.

Now and again the band would strike up a fox-trot, or a " waltz " at the request of one of those who had tasted the joys of "refinement" on the mainland. And I admit that on these occasions I was near to giggling. The lugubrious and droning sound of those tunes played on the accordion by players who foolishly tried to imitate the long-drawn-out lusciousness of a slick modern dance band, was for a short time very funny to listen to ; but it soon palled ; and I was relieved when these lapses of refinement passed, and the room was once more launched upon the thunderous, if monotonous, torrent of the natural Highland music.

I noticed one tall decently dressed man with a keen clean-shaven face, walking round the edge of the dance in an uneasy way as if he were looking for something. I began to be interested in him, and after I had watched him for about a quarter of an hour making spasmodic and not very successful attempts to get into conversation with the people around him, I decided to go up and speak to him myself. I was interested in his movements, and was inquisitive to know why he was failing to talk to these usually hospitable and friendly people. He was obviously well off and, what is so detestably known as, a "cultured" man. He might lend me money. I went up to him, made some remark and was quickly in conversation with him. He was an American and had soon told me what he was looking for, and, incidentally, explained his ill success with the Islanders.

He wanted to get them to sing! Barra, as most people know, is the source of many of the loveliest Gaelic songs, and the singing on the Island is still very beautiful. Now, my cultured friend had heard of these songs and this singing, so he had made the trip out from Oban so that he might hear them. But how he took my breath away, how he so discovered himself to me as the stock music-hall American, was that he told me that he wanted to get the whole thing put across in three hours. He had ascertained on the mainland that the boats from Oban to Barra—which are by no means frequent—sometimes stop at Castlebay for three or four hours. He would get the Islanders to sing to him before he went back on the boat at ten o'clock.

He appealed to me as a fellow "cultured man" to help him; they seemed so unwilling to sing, could I not gather a collection of some of those who sang best and he would, of course, pay them well for their trouble?

I tried to explain to him something of the shyness of the Gaelic nature; I told him that these people would drink with him, talk with him, shelter him from the rain and the night for as long as he needed hospitality, but

that they would never sing for him like that. If he remained on the Island for another three weeks and were to insinuate himself gently into the acquaintanceship of one family, he might hear some singing, if he made no great show about it. I told him that a good deal of what is written about the Gaelic singing by those who have claimed to have studied those songs in the crofts and heard them from the lips of the old women themselves is so much nonsense. "The singing is there right enough," I said rather arrogantly, for I had not much right to speak on the subject, after two days' residence on the Island of Barra, "but you cannot pick it up, like a trinket in a shop, for the asking."

He was humiliated, poor fellow. He was not a bad creature, not in the least the ordinary kind of traditional "hustler," and he went on, at some length, to justify himself. He was genuinely interested in folk songs and said that the remoter peoples of America still had folk songs which they would sing to strangers. I pointed out that, admirable as these remote Americans might be, they are not Gaelic—that was the difference. I introduced him to the priest, to see if that kindly man could help him. They went off together.

I went down to the boat at eleven o'clock, when it sailed, and was interested to see that he did not take my advice about staying three weeks on the Island, but was returning straight away to Oban.

XVII

The next day was Sunday. I decided to go to Mass over at Craigston, the little church on the west side. I had been told that it was the oldest church on the Island and I had liked the look of it as I passed it on my walk two days before.

I set out after breakfast and had soon crossed the little hill that divides Castlebay from the west, and was

descending to the unending sea which fronts that side. At Craigston there is no modern building and it is no more than a collection of tiny grey crofts, each the colour of the earth around, and perpetually smoking from the centre the odorous fumes of a peat fire. The church is minute, an indeterminate little stone building that might have been built at any period. It was old and quite timeless. I entered and found it deserted ; there were flowers on the altar ; the bare simplicity of the decoration did not show any other signs of human presence. It was silent and empty, an open, trustful place into which one felt the birds and animals had as much right to enter as the human beings. I walked out to see if there was anyone coming to church, but the hillside was as deserted as the church, and then I understood that I had made a mistake —I had come an hour too early. Mass was not till eleven.

I walked down to the sea to wait for Mass and sat down resting at the end of a little rocky promontory, which was at the side of a long, curving bay. The day was lowering with black clouds ; there had evidently been rough weather far out at sea, for the swell was bursting full and high all around me. The sand on this side of Barra is made out of powdered sea-shells and is, therefore, different from the usual colour. At first sight you would suppose it to be dead white or silver, until you hold up against it something that is really white, you will then perceive that it is ever so slightly influenced with the faintest gold—a fascinating and subtle colour. This has a strange effect upon the waves. As each long Atlantic roller raises itself and curves over, preparatory to bursting, the light of the day is reflected up through it from the white sand below and turns the colour of the wave to a bright peacock blue, that wonderful half-way house between blue and green. This, seen against an ordinary blue sea, is surprising enough, but when the weather is dark and the sea looks like liquid lead, it is difficult to believe one's eyes. I sat and watched the sight,

fascinated. The rising wind and storm had not yet flecked the top of any of the great waves with white. They marched in across the black and forbidding ocean, with intervals of about twenty seconds between each of them. The miracle of the transformation of colour did not last longer than half a second, and then each wave would sigh, rather than roar its great volume out upon the curve of the bay.

"It is pretty inteed, iss it not?" said a voice behind me, and I turned to see a tall old man beside me, with a plaid over his shoulders and with eyes that were blue as a young girl's.

"It is, it is!" was all I could say. "I have never seen anything like it."

"I have seen it for sixty years and I am not tired of it yet," continued the old man.

"They are great waves," I said. "They have had a long way to come—from America, I suppose, and that is why they are so full."

"Yess, there is no land between here and America. There is a little island to the north that might break their way, but these are from the west."

"The Island of St. Kilda?" I asked him.

"Yess, yess inteed, the Island of St. Kilda," and he laughed a little.

"Why are you laughing?" I asked him.

"It's a great island, St. Kilda, a great island," he answered, and went on laughing.

I soon found that all the people in Barra laughed when you mentioned St. Kilda. St. Kilda is the great joke there, for it is considered very funny that there should be any island more remote than Barra. And the people in Castlebay are never tired of telling you amusing stories about the simplicity and the odd provincial manners which the St. Kildians display when they visit Barra. I did not know this, however, when I was talking to the old man, and so I pressed him to tell me why he was laughing. He told me about the St. Kildians and also a

story which he said had happened when he was a small boy up in North Uist with his father.

He said that in those days very few of the St. Kildians had ever left their island, and so a number of them at last decided to make an expedition to (what was to them the mainland) the main body of the Outer Hebrides. They had made a fine great rowing boat, enough to carry over a dozen good men, and on a June day set out to row to North Uist. They rowed well and hard and reached their objective about evening—one of those long, luminous Western evenings on which you can see for miles. As they came into the shore, one of them turned round and saw that on the steps of the hotel which had just been built there, "some shentlemen were looking at them through telescopes."

"And then," continued my narrator, "they all were fearing that the shentlemen were shooting at them, and they were down on their knees and faces hiding in the bow of the boat for protection. But the hardness of their rowing had carried them on, and the fine boat sailed slowly up to the land, and when it touched it with a grating sound all the St. Kildians leapt out, and crouching down, scattered like moor fowl this way and that among the rocks, not crying or shouting for fear of the shooting, but just running in and out of the tangle and the heather."

I laughed, too, at this story, but I said that I could not help feeling sorry for the poor St. Kildians who had built such a good boat and then had had all this fear and disappointment on their landing.

"Aha, aha!" said my friend, with that peculiar noise of Gaelic half-assent. "Oh yes, but it is a great island St. Kilda, a great island, they have a great independence there."

"Are they Catholic there, like they are here?" I asked him.

He told me no, and explained that on Barra there had always been a population which had survived and had, since the Reformation, no infiltration from the mainland,

while on St. Kilda there had been no steady growth of the inhabitants. He said that he thought that there had been frequent depositions on the island by the landlords in the early nineteenth century who wanted thus to get rid of their surplus crofter stock. And so most of these coming from the mainland were Protestant. There had been no native and persistent tradition on St. Kilda.

I have never been to St. Kilda, but some days after this conversation I climbed Ben Heaval on a fine clear morning and was just able to distinguish far out on the edge of the Atlantic the tall pinnacle-like rocks of that strange island. I had heard by that time so many tales of it, that I sat down and gazed at it until the ascending mists of the day gently obscured it from me. I let it go with reluctance, thinking of all the astonishing stories of how the old men on the island talk there, of how they have a curious way of persuasion about them, and of the way children used to be born on that island. Lastly, as it sank out of sight into the ocean again, I could not help thinking of Johnson's and Boswell's absurd plan to take St. Kilda and live there for a whole winter—a strange island, I repeat.

When the old man had given me this explanation of why St. Kilda was Protestant he asked me if I was Catholic. I said that I was, and that I was waiting here for the eleven o'clock Mass. He nodded approvingly, and told me that he had a son who was a priest.

"He iss on the mainland," he told me, "at Y——."

"Not Father Mac——?" I asked him, thinking of the funny little fat priest whom I had seen there, and the absurd scene of all the people in the pub leaping up to point out to me the "Holy Mac——."

"Inteed yes," was the answer. "And you know him?"

"I have seen him," I replied, "and let me tell you, sir, that Father Mac—— is very greatly respected on the mainland." I could have said nothing to please the old man more, and we had a long and friendly talk about everything under the sun, including some curious and

doubtful tales about how in the "pat olt days" (the eighteenth century) the priests had to "make the Masses up in the hills for fear of the soldiers." There is no record of persecution of the Catholics on Barra, but there was probably some during the occasional visitations two hundred years ago, and these tales (if true) are the only remains of their influence.

At last my old friend left me, and noticing that people were beginning to come down the hill sides to the church, I roused myself and returned to my duties at Mass.

The service had begun and the little church was nearly full when I entered. There were no seats left at the back, so I went to one corner behind the last row and knelt there unnoticed, almost outside the congregation. There was not much singing, for there were no Gaelic hymns at Mass, but what there was, was clear and beautiful. Above the muttering of the priest and the whispered prayers of the people I could hear the note of the waves growing deeper and deeper under the storm. We (the praying, the adoring we) were conscious all the while of the strength and movement of the elements without. The wind was rising, we were not a hundred yards from the sea, the basis of our rock-built church was the rock of the promontory where I had been resting. And the text written across the cloth depending from the altar front was :

"SUPER HANC PETRAM ÆDIFICABO."

Pure faith is not the same thing as certain knowledge, though it often comprehends it; and those whose faith is impure and weak, that is to say those of us whose minds are muddied by complexity or vagueness, have knowledge only given to us in momentary and occasional glimpses. For such of us, the sympathy of other's faith, the sight of simple obedience, the sense of the power of the Church and all these ordinary emotional stimuli are sustenances without which it would be difficult to support that feebly tormenting mixture of Hope and Love which goes to make

our Faith. Without the perception of Faith in others, the loneliness of the soul (which is the price we have to pay for that great gift of God—our uniqueness) would become intolerable. To rely upon these sustenances too much to let them ever so slightly take the place of the true and God-given spiritual aids, is one of the most dangerous decadences of the religious mind. But they are there, and to be fearful of them is as foolish as to let them become master. It would be spiritual pride to shut out from one's heart the warm sympathy in belief around one during the wave of silence that sweeps over the kneeling crowd at the Elevation in a cathedral. It would be more than contemptible to allow it to become the thing for which one goes to Mass.

As I knelt in my corner of (and yet without) this congregation of fisher-folk and crofters, I was more conscious of the sustaining power of other people's faith than in the greatest ceremony in the greatest cathedral that I ever visited. For a brief moment I *knew*. And with that knowledge there were many delightful circumstances. Here I had attained the end of my journey and here was true and faithful simplicity. Here, in this remote Scottish church situated in this altogether admirable island, my own countrymen were greeting the Son of God upon the altar with the same gestures and words used by the priests and cardinals under St. Peter's dome this same morning. Here in this church, also dedicated to St. Peter, or in the church originally upon its foundations, those words, gestures and that powerful and pure faith had been the background for the lives of innumerable generations of equally unchanging Scotsmen. The evils and perplexities of the last thousand years had passed this place by. This people, so it seemed to me, had found perfection a long time ago and had kept it. I felt how lonely everyone must be who was outside the little church that morning.

Then quite suddenly that loneliness seized me too. For I knew that I too was outside it. That I had arrived

late and was kneeling like an interloper away from the others was symbolical of my true state of mind. I could never, never know and adore like these people, and I could only hope from afar off. And even now with that sudden sense of loneliness I lost, in a devilish reaction from my mood of hope, the real reason for my kneeling there at all. Effort in one moment seemed valueless, and nothing was worth the winning. What was this before which we were prostrate save a dying and ineffectual system of thought and life that had seen its day, and was preserved here only because of the remoteness of this place? That remoteness which I had so carefully sought out and professed to admire—what was there really in it save to a sentimentally corrupt mind? This country which I had so excitedly rediscovered and enjoyed for myself, how was it any more admirable than any other country, or more mine—I who had lost my nationality in a spineless cosmopolitanism? Why was I on my knees? What was there on that slab of stone that was more than Bread and Wine?

There are those who say that these moods which so unexpectedly possess the mind are not evil, but are the signs of a struggling power of Reason which is in these momentary glimpses showing its head. "Here," they say, "is Truth, and the light of Reason has for the moment illuminated it." This is not so. For at these times without the God-given power of Reason the mind would collapse entirely. It is Reason founded upon remembrance that alone faces the Enemy at these times of possession when everything fades before one into a huge denial of life and purpose.

So at this moment and in this place when the "ridiculous impossibility" of belief swamped my inconstant and unguarded self, it was Reason only that told me that this couldn't last, that if I could remember energy and Love and Faith and Beauty and the conviction of Truth, I could hope for them again. It was Reason only, and happily triumphantly, that prompted in my heart the

weak hackneyed prayer, "Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief," while I knelt there in that small gathering of the simply faithful and listened to the great waves of the Atlantic beating on the rock outside.

EPILOGUE

About thirty days later I was wandering in an aimless manner through the streets of Glasgow, turning over in my mind the solution of a delicate problem. It was half-past eight in the evening. I had just arrived from Oban and had gone straight to a post-office to collect some money which I had telegraphed to be sent there for me. The post-office was shut. I had one shilling and sixpence in my pocket. I knew no one in the whole city, I was infernally hungry, and I was wondering whether to spend all my money in trying to get a bed in one of the cheap lodging houses which I supposed to exist down by the Clydeside or to fill myself out with one-and-sixpence worth of sausages and mashed, and walk about all night until the post-office opened in the morning, when I could get my money and take the train to London.

It began to rain slightly and I had almost decided on the bed when I passed the door of one of those innumerable high tea-shops which fill the, to me, always confusing and alarming streets of central Glasgow. The door opened and I caught a glimpse of a warm dark brown interior with high wooden partitions and waitresses moving between them with dishes of food. There were probably only two partitions one waitress, and one dish that was probably empty, but my imagination did the rest. If I went to my cheap flea-haunted bed I should, so I told myself, only spend a slightly less miserable night than if I had walked about ; whereas, if I went in here and had a good meal, begged a cigarette from another diner and loafed about for an hour in the warmth and comfort, I

should at least have my one-and-sixpence worth of complete satisfaction.

I paused outside in indecision, when the possibility of a compromise came before me. I remembered that some friends of mine who had been motoring in a small car back to England, had left a suitcase with some books and other things which they wanted me to leave in the left luggage office at St. Enoch's Station. They had paid the leaving fee in advance for two months, and had sent me on the ticket to Oban. I decided now that I would get the suitcase, go to a cheap hotel where I would get a room without paying for it in advance on the security of my luggage, have my meal and then go and get my money out of the post-office in the morning. I asked the way to St. Enoch's Station, was relieved to find that there was no hitch in getting the suitcase, and then set out to find an hotel which would take me in.

Here my difficulties began again. I now realized, when I considered the present state of my appearance, that I lacked the courage to march into an hotel and ask for a room specifically not to be paid for in advance. From my hat down to the toes of my boots I was disreputable. The hat was a shapeless mass of dirty felt, the huge army boots were caked in layers of mud, and in between these extremities my trousers showed against their nondescript grey some deep stains and one fluttering rent. My coat was still whole, but my khaki shirt had turned almost black round the neck as the result of two months' uninterrupted wear, and smelt abominably of fish from my many outings with the herring fleet.

I walked on through the grim, louring old streets with the glow from the window fronts falling tantalizingly across the mud and the rain. As I paused opposite each hotel I decided that it was just too respectable for me, and walked on again, my suitcase growing heavier at every yard. I cursed myself, my timidity, the weather, the suitcase and this city which I told myself was a detestable sink of unkindliness, ugliness and industrialism. No

wonder people were shaking their heads over the state of Scotland and were asking themselves what it was coming to if this was the greatest and most important city in it. It was not even (I thought, as I trudged on through the rain and between the black high houses) admirable as many modern cities are ; it was just gross, without any of the cruelly proud and occasionally magnificent expressions of modern materialism which one sees in Paris and in photographs of New York. I should probably fail to get a room now and had merely added to my difficulties by having to spend my night in the company of this disgusting suitcase.

" Carry yer bag, sir ? Carry yer bag, sir ? "

I looked round and saw that I was being followed by a wizened little animal of a Glasgow slum boy. His long and tangled hair fell over his face and eyes like a shaggy dog's and his bare feet pattered and splashed through the mud, a " running accompaniment " to his monotonous whine :

" Carry yer bag, sir ? Carry yer bag, sir ? " which was chanted in a high voice as if the words had no meaning.

" No."

But he still continued to patter and chant about a yard behind me. I walked on, irritated by his insistance and the peculiar tone of his whining. Then an idea came to me and I turned round to him.

" Look here, sonny, I don't want you to carry my bag and it's no good asking me to let you. But I'll give you twopence if you'll show me the cheapest hotel round here that you know of."

I thought that not only would he know of some cheap and out-of-the-way place, but that also if he took me there it would probably get me over the difficulty of making an entrance.

" A' richt, sir," he said, with a half-winking grimace and a quickness for my meaning which few Edinburgh and no Southern street-boys would have had ; and then proceeded to lead me on down a side street, looking

over his shoulder encouragingly every few yards and beckoning me on with the movements of his head.

When we eventually reached an extremely broken-down looking little place in the corner of a side street, he stopped and rang the bell. I attempted to give him the twopence and dismiss him, but he waved it aside with what at the time I thought was a generous gesture and said :

" Ah'll show ye anither if this yin is full up."

However, it was not full up, and when the rather ample Scotswoman who answered the door had admitted us, he seized hold of my bag and scampered upstairs, while mine hostess, standing in the musty, ill-lit hall, shouted to us that I could have the room the second on the left, first floor. It was a tiny room but tolerably clean, and I looked round on it with such satisfaction that I tipped my guide an extra penny and gave him threepence. His monkey-like little paw closed on it with a swift gesture, like a bird pecking at food, and then he stood still with his back to the door, looking at me while I shoved the suitcase under the bed. After a minute, as he was still there, I asked him what he wanted.

" Ah'll no go till ye gie me saxpence," he said sullenly with his little jaw set uglily.

" I've given you a penny more than I said I would. I just can't give you sixpence, so it's no good, my lad," I replied.

" Ah'll no go till ye gie me saxpence," he repeated sullenly.

" Don't be stupid, you little fool ; but if you like to meet me at the station to-morrow I'll give you a bob."

" Ah'll no go till ye gie me saxpence," and his voice had that senseless whine of his first chant, sounding as if his words had no meaning for him.

I was so annoyed, as much by the sound of his voice as by his impertinence, that I advanced towards him to chuck him out.

He thought I was going to strike him, for my hand was raised, and so he leapt back behind the half-open door and crouched down like a terrified animal. In an instant his face quite changed ; his teeth were bared, his eyes wrinkled up, and his hands held up before his face for protection were crooked and curled like the claws of a cat at bay. And it was just like a cat that he looked in that corner : a cat with her back against a tree which she dare not turn and climb, for fear of feeling the dogs' teeth in her spine. In his startled eyes and curled-back mouth I saw again the face of the gypsy boy whom I had met with the red heads in Morar.

" Out you get, you little brute," I said, stepping back so as to show him that I was not going to touch him and that the door was free to him. He was gone in a flash, and I heard the patter of his bare feet scurrying down the passages and stairs.

Immediately enlivened and amused by this scene, I ran to the window of the room, which half abutted out on to the street, and watched the brown little figure flying along in the gutter like a water-rat.

Here was something I realized at once, which put a bit of life into these grim streets and which gave me something of a glow of affection for Glasgow. The courageous impertinence of the scene, the cheek of demanding an extra sixpence from someone who, no doubt, seemed to him just a stupid, clumsy stranger, his evident readiness to bite my finger to the bone had I laid a hand on him, his quickness of understanding, all these delighted me, speaking as they did of an ancestry not far behind his birth. He was from a kind of men who not long ago had crouched in the heather (just as he had crouched behind the door) and had leapt out to stab their enemies in the back, who were also capable of being stabbed in the back without a murmur for any loyalty which their determined minds had fixed upon.

As I leant out of the window and watched my amusing little antagonist disappear round the corner, I noticed

that the sign of the hotel bore the Hebridean name of MacNeil. And with the sight of that name so familiar on the Island which I had just left, and the remembrance of the crouching furious little Celtic boy, I suddenly remembered, and with a glow of increased appreciation, a story which a friend of mine had told me and which he always used to say was so typical of Glasgow—I understood it now.

He has told me that when he was a small boy, some fifty years ago in Glasgow, his father used on Sundays to bring home with him from church, one of the "Kirk elders," a respectable prosperous old draper called MacMillan, who had two fine shops in the centre of Glasgow. The two old men would have a stiff dram of hot whisky toddy and talk profoundly on abstruse points of church politics.

However, after the second dram old MacMillan would cease to contribute words to the conversation and would merely listen. At last, if he stayed long enough, he would begin to rock backwards and forwards in his chair, the tears would roll down his face, and he would be heard moaning to himself:

"The landless MacMillans! Oh, the landless MacMillans!"

"What's Mr. MacMillan greetin' for, Father?" my friend would say.

"Wheest, Jimmy," was his father's reply. "I've often told you that Mr. MacMillan's folk have lost all their land."

"But, father," my friend would reply, "what's *he* greetin' for? Has he no got yon two fine shops?"

But all the time the old MacMillan, so unexpectedly stripped of his respectability and the consciousness of his two fine shops by the influence of the warm whisky and the emotion of a Sunday mood, would go on weeping sentimentally for his clan so long ago disinherited.

Yes, Glasgow was the Celtic capital. If I had seen in this house some gleams of the Celtic savagery, could I not

try to find the other famous quality of the race—hospitality ?

So I withdrew from the window and from my ruminations, and descended into the depressing little hall of the house where, raising my voice against my increasing timidity, I shouted out :

" Mrs. MacNeil ! "

" Ay, what d'ye want ? " was the reply that was vouchsafed to me from behind a closed door immediately beside me.

" Mrs. MacNeil, may I speak to you a moment ? " I said again, though not quite so loudly.

The door opened, and the large and forbidding woman who had admitted me to the house stood facing me with her back to a lighted room.

" What d'ye want ? " she repeated.

" Mrs. MacNeil," I said, " I must tell you before I take your room for the night that I've hardly got any money on me here ; but I've got some waiting for me at the post-office which I can get in the morning, only if you let me stay here I'm afraid you'll have to trust me enough to let me go out in the morning to get the money before you're paid."

Her answer was a monosyllable which cannot be written down, because there are no consonants or vowels in the English spelling to stand for that remarkable Scottish sound.

" By the way," I added, " I've got a suitcase up in my room which I could leave here as a security while I'm out."

" What's in yon bag ? " she asked.

" Books," I answered. " Books that are much more valuable than the cost of my night's lodging here."

This was a mistake, and I quickly understood it.

" Books ! " she snorted. " Books ! What should I want wi' the kind o' trash you'd be reading ? "

" Oh, but I didn't mean that, Mrs. MacNeil. I simply meant that the books in my bag would fetch two

or three pounds if you cared to sell them if I didn't come back."

"How did ye know that I wisna going to chairge ye more than two or three pun for y're nicht's lodging here?" was the unexpected reply. "Besides," she added, "what for should I have the trouble of luggin' y'r great bag all round Glasgae for ye to pay y're rightful due?"

This was so just that I could only say that I was sorry, and wait rather foolishly for her next remark which was:

"Where have you come from?"

Here was my chance: I could now make a direct appeal and see how it worked. I told her where I had come from and how, she backing into the light and I advancing towards it as I spoke. The Scots are all good listeners, and I was allowed to go into details. When I had finished my Æneid she said, motioning me into the room: "Ye'll be wanting y're supper."

I was still, however, not quite certain of my ground, and so I felt that I'd better tell her that I could not pay for my supper.

"Have ye no' got some very valuable books upstairs?"

This was said with a grim smile like January sunshine.

I laughed, as was expected of me, and then followed her into what turned out to be a kitchen. There was an untidy little maid bustling about, and there were some dishes steaming and fresh from the oven. Soon I was set down and a huge helping of Irish stew (a dish I usually detest, but now found more agreeable than anything I had tasted for many days) was placed before me. There followed a quarter of an hour's silence while I ate. Then I was given a bowl, rather than a cup, of tea, and finally I produced from my pocket a stained packet of cigarettes that had twice been drenched by the Highland rain, and twice dried by the infinite length of a Highland summer day.

I took out the last cigarette, and abandoning myself to the luxury of a well-filled stomach and a well-earned

smoke, I stretched myself out before the kitchen fire which even on this autumn day was pleasant to a tired man.

The old lady, her tongue now thoroughly loosened, chattered on about all her travels (they were not very extensive) for she perceived me to be interested in that subject, while I half listened to her see-saw Glasgow voice, half meditated upon my journey and upon the end of it.

Glasgow had always been strange to me, what I had seen of it previously had confused me and made me feel ill at ease. The stories I had heard of it, the reminiscences of people who had lived in it, all seemed to me so contradictory. Now quite suddenly everything seemed to fit in. I knew no more about the city now than previously, save this night's experience, the disappointments at the post-office, the trudging through the ugly streets, the scene with the little porter, the comfort of this supper, and yet somehow I now caught and felt around me what I imagined to be the essential genius of the place. Possibly the food given so generously to so empty a stomach may have influenced my tired brain into a sentimental acceptance of my circumstances, but I felt, sitting in this crude, dirty little kitchen of this tenth-rate little hotel something of the warmth of that particular kind of hospitality which I had enjoyed farther north. Instead of a wild stretch of moorland closing in upon this sheltering room there was the far more forbidding press of great streets and roaring factories. The same romanticism (so I sentimentalized) that had built the Celtic character in those moors had enabled them to believe in the great romantic fraud of Industrialism. These giants of machines so beautiful in their fire and their steel, so prolific in their implied promises of a new age—who had been taken in more grossly by them, who had more passionately abandoned themselves to their service than the Glasgow people? Their most commonly remarked defects, their surrender to the great Devil of the nineteenth century sprang from a lovable quality in their character.

Someone had said this before about some other people, but it all seemed so new and revealing to me as I sat there with my monstrous boots stretched out before the fire and thought of the old draper rocking himself in his chair and crying for the landless MacMillans, of the Baillie Nicol Jarvie, whose blood moved uneasily and a little more quickly as he heard, " Thae Heelan Devils whewing and whustling," while they moved in the darkness about the Glasgow Gaol. I thought of the great dirty river which was Scotland's path not only to the world but also to the Hebrides, which flowed through this city, of the innumerable old people in the Highlands who had a son " doin' fine " in Glasgow, of the kindly grim old creature who had befriended me this evening, and of the savage little boy crouching like a wild cat behind the door of my bedroom, and with his teeth ready to bite. I felt that I was just beginning to understand how ignorant I was about this contradictory town and was humiliated to think that I had ever been so foolish as to sneer at it while knowing nothing whatever about it.

At last the noise of the city outside began to fall away, and the conversation between me and my hostess to fail, so, taking a candle with me, I stiffly mounted the stairs to bed.

When I reached the top I turned to say good night, and saw the old lady standing at the foot, a lamp held high above her, so as to see where I was going. The half light and the deep shadows mingled with the harsh lines of her face; and for a moment I was so rude as to stand contemplating a sight, which seemed to me an epitome of the Northern genius.

She thought I was hesitating for something to say, so she said it herself.

" Mind ye dinna dirty thae valuable books wi' y're finger-marks and y're spittin on the pages if I'm to sell them the morn," was the last unsmiling jest that was flung at me as I turned the corner to my bedroom.